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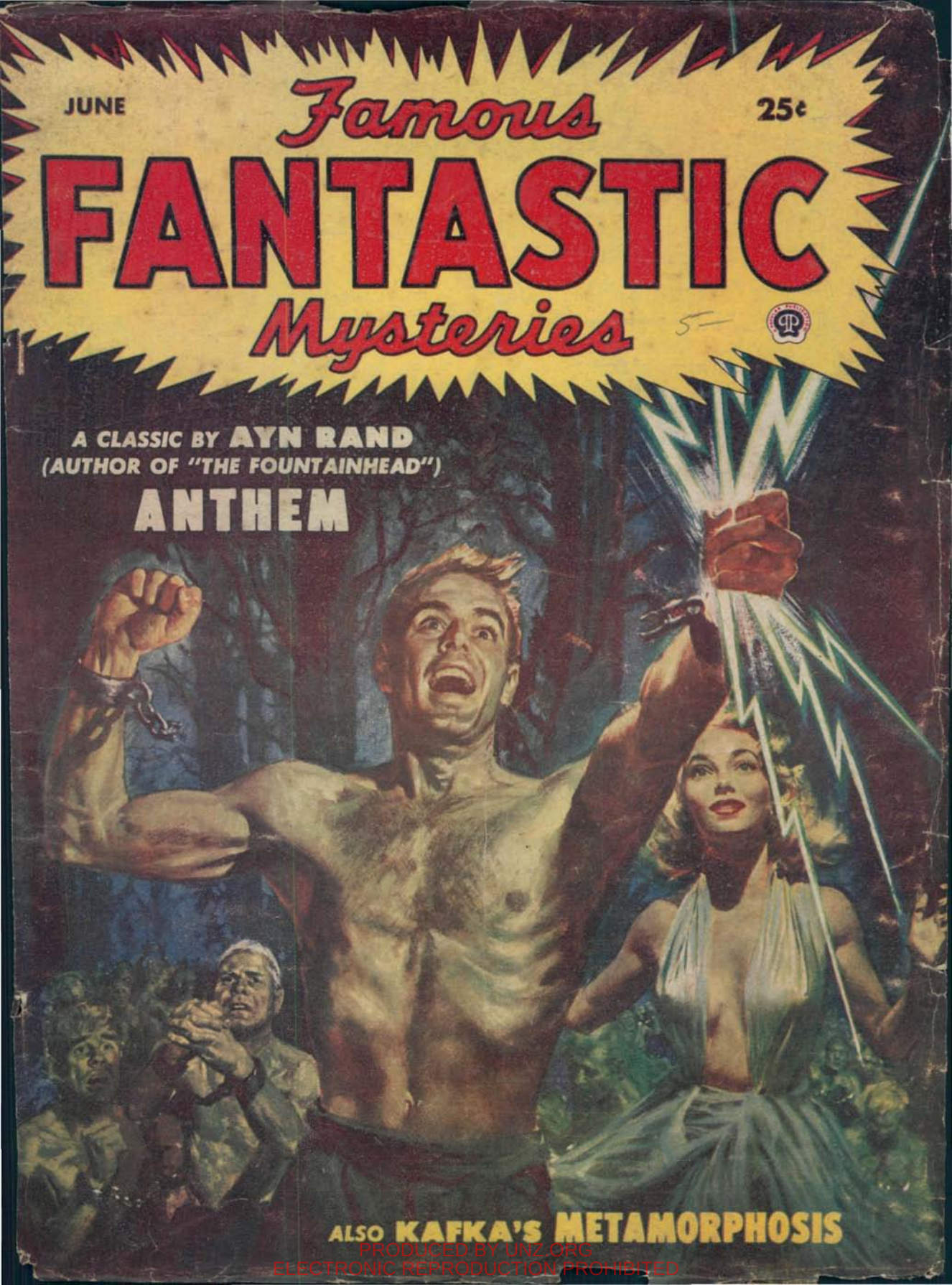

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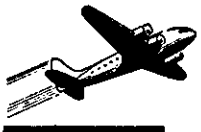

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Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

25c

Combined with FANTASTIC NOVELS MAGAZINE

VOL. 14 JUNE, 1953 NO. 4

Novelettes

ANTHEM ..... Ayn Rand 12

He alone, of all the prison world of indexed numbers, had dared to dream of long-forgotten freedom. . . .

Copyright 1946 by Ayn Rand. Reprinted by permission of the author.

THE METAMORPHOSIS ..... Franz Kafka 36

Already he had taken on the alien loathsome shape. . . . In all except the still watching mind—the vestige of a soul that still could suffer. . . .

Schocken Books, Inc., New York, 1952.

WORMS OF THE EARTH ..... Robert E. Howard 64

Titus Sulla played fox to a dangerous eagle when he baited the highland king whose fens bred magic more deadly than the bite of Caesar's swords. . . .

Copyright 1932 by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company for Weird Tales, November 1932.

Short Stories

FIND THE HAPPY CHILDREN ..... Benjamin Ferris 78

PENDULUM ..... Ray Bradbury and Henry Hasse 86

Copyright 1941 by Popular Publications, Inc.

BERNIE GOES TO HELL ..... Arthur Dekker Savage 92

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DIRGE ..... Louis M. Hobbs 34

HAUNTED HOSTEL ..... Emma L'Hommedieu Frost 62

Editor, MARY GNAEDINGER

Cover by Lawrence. Inside Illustrations by Finlay and Lawrence

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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THE READERS VIEWPOINT

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

Dear Readers:

The message of "Anthem", our feature novel in this issue, is similar to that in "The Fountainhead", the story which made Ayn Rand famous. However, our story is a fantasy, and therefore has a place in our magazine. Of "The Fountainhead" Ayn Rand says, "The key statement to the whole conception of the book is in Roark's speech: 'I wished to come here and say that I am a man who does not exist for others. It had to be said. The world is perishing from an orgy of self-sacrificing.'"

We were very fortunate in securing the right to give you "Anthem", a true fantasy, and one filled with suspenseful drama as well as a theme of paramount significance.

"The Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka is also a true fantasy, and a suspenseful one, and we have been also very fortunate to have this little masterpiece added to our long collection of the great stories of the "unreal" world. It is the story which was evolved out of the writer's own agonizing experience. In The Metamorphosis, he actually does assume the form by which he was so cruelly described.

There has been much controversy about the works of Kafka, partly because he is a literary pioneer. William Phillips writes: "Kafka speaks frequently of his feeling that his body is inadequate and superfluous, making claims that he cannot fulfill and distracting his mind from its proper intellectual tasks. (Kafka was, in fact, sickly and he died at an early age of tuberculosis.) And he is constantly distraught by his sense of being cut off from other people, especially from his family, which apparently formed the crucial tie of his life." This torment was turned by the writer's genius into something much greater than the sufferings of an unbalanced mind—into the great story which we herewith present to our readers.

Mary Gnaedinger

NEW YEAR'S GREETING

Dear Mrs. Gnaedinger:

Best wishes for the New Year, from a reader who's been with you since December, 1943!

I had originally planned to sit down and write a very critical letter, griping about everything I thought you should have done last year and didn't. But the spirit of the New Year has taken hold of me and instead of griping I'll just give you some ideas for improvement this next year.

You got things started right this year by giving us Mundy's best novel. Yes, "Full Moon" was very good, its only distractions being a poor cover and being altogether too similar to other novels along this line that you have presented recently.

And for the issue following that, how could you go wrong with one of Haggard's best? I just hope it has illos by Lawrence.

Lawrence's best recent pictures were in "Rebirth." They were more in his old style of '44 than any others he's done in a long while.

After a somewhat jackrabbit existence for several issues, I am pleased to see you settled down in your old size and shape. Now just give us back the sunburst on the cover.

Suggestions for future printing: More Taine. Is "Gold Tooth" suitable? Don't give us "Green Fire," "Quayle's Invention," or "Cosmic Geoids." They're not good Taine. You might be able to obtain "Forbidden Garden" now, and it's good!

I would like more S. Fowler Wright. "Deluge" I can remember as a pretty good tale and not too long. And you said once that you would try for more Shiel; where is he? Have you checked those other J. Leslie Mitchel and Edwin Lester Arnold stories?

How about Alan Sullivan's "In the Beginning"? It is a good story of a lost land—another one—in Patagonia that contains prehistoric animals. It's quite similar to some of Taine's. And Diomedes de Pereyra's "Land of the Golden Scarabs" is along the same line.

Along the short story line, give us Chambers,

(Continued on page 8)

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Would you like to earn up to $3 an hour for your spare time? YOU CAN DO IT! It makes no difference whether you are 18 or 80—whether you ever sold anything before or not—whether you have one hour or fifty hours a week to spare. You don't have to be a "salesman" or "saleswoman" because this isn't "selling"—it's more like giving something away. We'll establish you in your own business at our expense! You pay nothing—risk nothing!

Women buy over two million pairs of nylons every day. Most pay $1.35 to $1.95 the pair. Suppose you offered finest quality, nationally advertised nylons at 49c a pair, what woman would hesitate to order? Yet, that is all they cost if they run or snag within guarantee period up to THREE WHOLE MONTHS! This sensational low cost includes your commission, bonus and even postage.

There is nothing for you to buy or deliver. Nothing to learn or study. You can start making money one hour after receiving the free outfits. Just show the line—the amazing written guarantee of free replacement—display the free samples given to you and write orders. Could anything be easier?

We deliver and collect. You get cash in advance on every order you write and can easily earn the huge cash bonus that increases your earnings by 40%. You can never know how easy it is for you to get a steady extra income until you have the free, complete money-making Kendex outfit. Your ONLY cost is a stamp to mail the coupon. Send it today! You pay nothing now or later. Show the outfit to 5 women. That's all. When you see how eager women will be to give you orders, you'll thank your lucky stars that you answered this advertisement.

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H. Armstrong of Tenn. earned $202 in 9 days. C. Watkins of Oregon sent in 92 orders in one day. Mrs. J. B. Thurmond of Utah has already earned over $800. These exceptional earnings show you the possibilities. Over a million dollars has already been earned by others just like yourself.

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Complete line of world acclaimed cosmetics for complexion loveliness, bathtime beauty and good grooming. A huge field that will give you a steady income. You can quickly become a beauty specialist. You don't have to buy or deliver anything. Just write orders!

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(Continued from page 6)

Dunsany, and E. F. Benson. Check the stories in F. B. Austin's "When Mankind Was Young." They are good pre-history shorts—cave men, ancient Egypt, etc.

I would like you to start using serials again. That way would give us "Wisdom's Daughter" and the other longies that we have had to miss.

That's a heck of a lot to ask for in one year, isn't it?

I still need some pre-1943 F.F.M.s: I have old Arkham books etc., to trade.

Harold Billings.

Rt. 2, Box 334-B
Edinburg, Texas.

Editor's Note: Most of the books you mention, and the authors, have been checked and set aside for reasons such as—no more fantasies by the autor—copyright unavailable—too long—more science-fiction than fantasy, etc. Several, however, may be suitable for future issues. You will have noted that the sunburst is back on the cover!

FANTASY VET'S CONVENTION

The "Welcome" mat is out for all readers of F.F.M. who would like to attend the Third Annual Convention of The Fantasy Veterans' Association on Sunday, April 19, beginning at 1 p.m. The address is Werdermann's Hall, Third Ave. at East 16th St., N.Y.C.

This is a wonderful opportunity for readers to meet the men and women behind the magazines they enjoy so much. Many editors, authors, illustrators and other s-f celebrities will be on hand to meet attendees. A short film program is being arranged, and a giant auction of science-fictionalia will be held, in which original cover paintings, original interior illustrations, original manuscripts, rare back number magazines and rare books for collectors, will be sold to the highest bidders.

Money from the auction will be used by the organization to send magazines and books to servicemen and women overseas who cannot obtain their favorite reading material in any other manner.

There is no admission charge, and no collection will be taken up.

We're sure we can promise anyone who enjoys science-fiction a really fine time, which he will remember for a long while—at least for a year, until the *Fourth* Fan-Vet Convention!

Ray Van Houten,
Secy., Fantasy Veterans' Association.
127 Spring St.,
Paterson 3, N.J.

LIKED "FULL MOON"

Since I'm strictly a science fiction reader I usually don't buy any fantasy magazines. But as I recently read a story by Talbot Mundy entitled "Jungle Jest", which I enjoyed immensely, and since your lead story was by Mundy, I broke down and bought a copy of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. I wasn't disappointed, rather I was surprised. "Full Moon" was better than I had hoped it to be. Let's have more stories by Mundy.

I see that you're going to have a Haggard story in the April ish. Better yet, one that I haven't read.

If these are samples of F.F.M.'s stories, you've got yourself another faithful reader.

Lyle Kessler.

2450-76 Ave.,
Phila. 38, Penna.

THE NEW INDEX

A number of inquiries have indicated that many of your readers would be interested in learning about the "Index to The Science Fiction Magazines 1926-1950."

Virtually every magazine collector, frustrated by the difficulty of finding wanted stories, has at least considered making some sort of index to his collection. Some have stopped with thinking about it—some have actually done considerable work on it, before bogging down in the sheer mass of material to be catalogued. Because it was started in 1935 and grew with the growth of the field, my card index is one of the few that was completed. This index of over 20,000 cards, filling 21 file drawers, has now been published in book form.

Because it is complete, it is an index to *your* science fiction magazine collection. All of the science fiction and most of the fantasy magazines are covered complete from the first issues (the earliest in 1926) thru 1950. In all, over 1275 issues of 58 titles are indexed, including *Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Fantastic Novels* and many others.

The Index has been arranged to get the maximum good from each collection, whether that of a completist or a selective group covering only certain magazines or authors. All stories and articles are alphabetically indexed under both author and title. Each entry gives the magazine, date of issue, page number and length under both headings. At considerable trouble, many previously unknown pen-names have been unearthed and verified, the real name being given wherever the pen-name is used.

In addition, for those desiring to complete runs, either of one magazine or many, the volume includes a complete Checklist of the Magazines Indexed which gives under each title the dates, volume and numbers, page size, number of pages and cover artists (who are also cross-indexed in the author index). Back cover pictures are also listed and cross-indexed.

All this has been assembled into one handsome volume of 200 8½ x 11 inch pages. On a heavy, smooth-finished paper, it is strongly bound in full buckram to make a book that will stand up under the constant use you will most certainly give it.

Here, all prepared for your use, is a complete index to *your* own magazine collection. The cost is but a fraction of what you would pay just for the cards to index it yourself and the work has all been done for you.

The "Index To the Science Fiction Magazines 1926-1950" has been published by Perri Press, Box 5007, Portland 13, Ore., at $6.50. The edition is limited to just 2000 copies. The book may

(Continued on page 10)

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Reducing Specialist Says:

LOSE WEIGHT Where It Shows Most REDUCE MOST ANY PART OF THE BODY WITH

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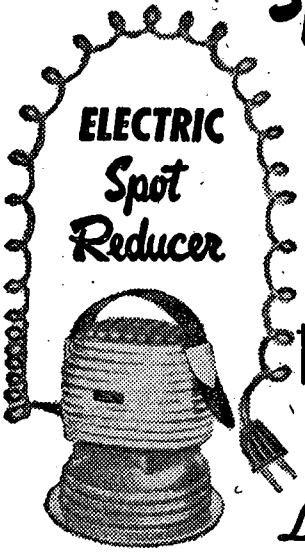
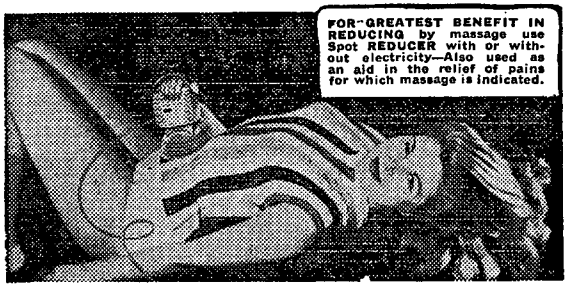
Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing Penetrating Massage



PLUG IN— GRASP HANDLE AND APPLY



FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use Spot REDUCER with or without electricity—Also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.

TAKE OFF EXCESS WEIGHT!

Don't Stay FAT—You Can Lose POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY

Without Risking HEALTH

Take pounds off — keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—MASSAGE!

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercise or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

Your Own Private Masseur at Home

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters laboratory approved.

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only $1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman $8.95 plus delivery—or send $9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS

CAN'T SLEEP

Relax with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.

MUSCULAR ACHES:

A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be aided by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

USED BY EXPERTS

Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

SPOT REDUCER CO., Dept. B-456
318 Market St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose $1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only $8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

☐ I enclose $12.98. Send DeLuxe Model.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... *State* .....

☐ SAVE POSTAGE — Check here if you enclose $9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies. ☐ I enclose $12.98. Send DeLuxe Model.

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(Continued from page 8)

be ordered from the publisher or if more information is desired they will be glad to send you a descriptive folder.

Yours for more enjoyment from your magazines,

Donald B. Day.

% Perri Press,
Box 5007,
Portland 13, Oregon.

REMEMBERING "THE DEATH MAKER"

I always marvel at your ability to keep the quality of F.F.M. so high. Now the current issue carries on in the same way. "Full Moon" looks fine. Also, I'm delighted to find another Haggard story coming next time.

I wonder if you have seen the letter from Fletcher Pratt which appeared in the November *Astounding Science Fiction*. Pratt, you know, is the famous stf author, anthologist, and military expert. He cites some famous old stories which would be fine for your magazine.

The ones he lists are: Kipling's "Finest Story in the World," "Mark of the Beast," and "Wireless"; "Andre Maurois' "The Thinking Machine"; Albert Camus' "The Plague"; Max Pemberton's "Iron Pirate"; Roy Norton's "Vanishing Fleets"; and W. T. Hornaday's "The Man Who Became a Savage."

Pratt also mentions a wonderful science fiction story, almost completely neglected, which one of your readers mentioned in a letter not long ago. I certainly hope you will give its reprinting very serious consideration. It is "Children of the Morning" by W. L. George. Pratt calls it one of the best science fiction stories ever produced.

Another letter writer cites "Drowsy" by J. A. Mitchell, "The Centaur" by Algernon Blackwood, "Children of the Zodiac" by Kipling; "In the Beginning" by Norman Douglas, and "The Shaving of Shagpat" by George Meredith as fine classics.

Just reading of these titles whets my appetite for these stories. Maybe some of them would be suitable for you pages and I hope we can be seeing some of them before long.

I also continue to hope for "Houseboat on the Styx" and something by Charles Williams, such as "Place of the Lion."

Meanwhile, I continue to enjoy your great magazine immensely. I want to again put in a plug for Austin Small's "The Death Maker." Maybe the plot is trite, but Small's writing is great. The story has pace and action. It really moves. It's one of the best-written ones you've had—none of those long boring passages. I'm surprised it didn't receive more praise.

Donald Allgeier.

San Marcos, Texas.

THE PHILLY CONVENTION

I look into your readers' pages very deeply and note that there are a lot of staunch Robert E. Howard supporters in the house. You gave in to them by publishing "Skull Face." This was his first long novel, and, in spite of what Augie Derleth says, is not representative of Howard's best. There are others which you should publish.

But that is neither here nor there. I came to speak about poetry. There have been requests for some of Howard's poetry; now, Derleth reprinted a good bit of it in "Dark of the Moon," *but* he just scratched the surface. I would like to see some of the best poems published.

And how about telling your readers that we Philadelphians have a Science Fiction Society that anyone interested in fantasy and/or science fiction can join and meet such members as Sprague de Camp, Alan E. Nourse, Milt Rothman, and many others? As secretary of the club, I'd be glad to send meeting announcements to anyone in the Philly area who'd like to receive them. And don't forget that we're holding a big convention on September 5, 6, and 7 in 1953!

Dave Hammond

Box 89,
Runnemede, N.J.

11TH WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

Do you want to be a part of the year's outstanding fan activity which will be held at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on September 5th, 6th and 7th of this year?

Do you want to meet your favorite authors, editors, publishers, fan correspondents and science fiction readers from the forty-eight States? They will be at the 11th World in Philadelphia.

You can look forward to three days of fine programs, covering all phases of the field, and entertainment, both scheduled and spontaneous.

To join the committee and become a part of this great event, send $1.00 (One dollar) to:

11th

WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION
BOX 2019, PHILADELPHIA 3, Pa.

You will receive regular Progress Reports (the first is ready), your membership card, and all official mailings.

DO IT NOW

A MOST WONDERFUL STORY

Yesterday I bought a copy of the Feb. ish of F.F.M. which, as usual, featured a most wonderful story in the field of fantastic writing, "Full Moon." I am a comparatively new reader of fantastic novels. The first novel of this kind was H. G. Wells' "The Time Machine," which was published in the Aug. ish of 1950 of F.F.M. Next was F.N.'s Sept. ish of 1950. This was the beginning. The following months and years I bought a copy of every issue of F.F.M. and F.N.

When the latter failed to appear after the June ish in 1951, F.F.M. was the only magazine featuring fantastic reading I was able to get. The stories it featured were simply wonderful. One of the best was Sax Rohmer's "Brood of the Witch-Queen." The most unsatisfactory was "The Threshold of Fear" by Arthur J. Rees.

After buying your magazine, the first thing I

(Continued on page 101)

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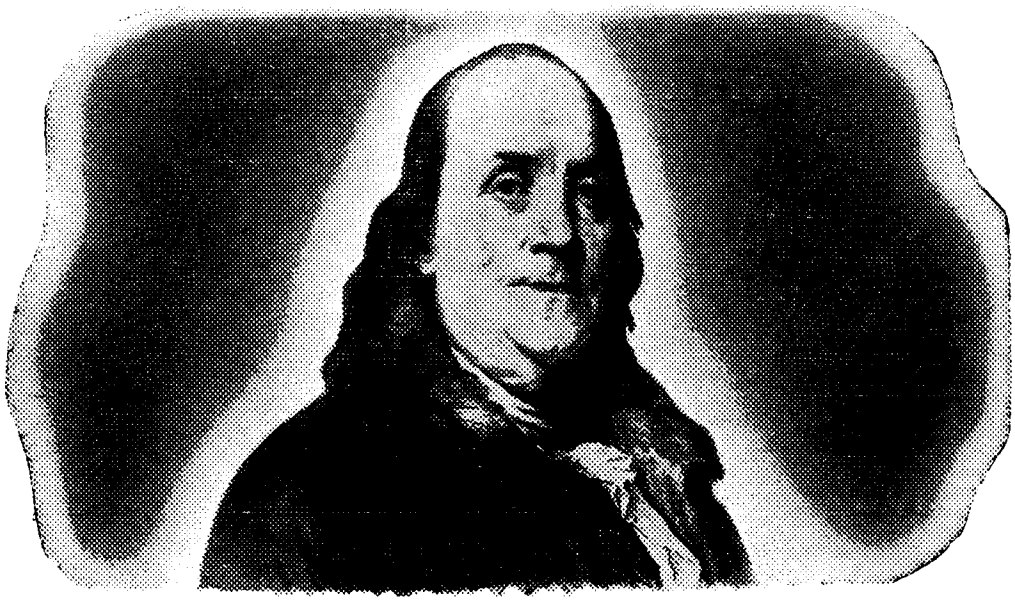
WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Benjamin Franklin—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) first came to America in 1694. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

The Rosicrucians
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Write for YOUR FREE COPY of "The Mastery of Life"—TODAY. No obligation. No salesmen. A nonprofit organization. Address: Scribe V.E.E.

SEND THIS COUPON

Scribe V.E.E.
The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
San Jose, California

Please send me the *free* book, *The Mastery of Life*, which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.

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ADDRESS_____

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We knew that the breath of a miracle had touched us. . . .

By Ayn Rand

ANTHEM

He alone, of all the prison world of indexed numbers, had dared to dream of long-forgotten freedom. . . . An exciting story of revolt against a terrifying world of the future.

IT IS a sin to write this. It is a sin to think words no others think and to put them down upon a paper no others are to see. It is base and evil. It is as if we were speaking alone to no ears but our own. And we know well that there is no transgression blacker than to do or think alone. We have broken the laws. The laws say that men may not write unless the Council of Vocations bid them so. May we be forgiven!

But this is not the only sin upon us. We

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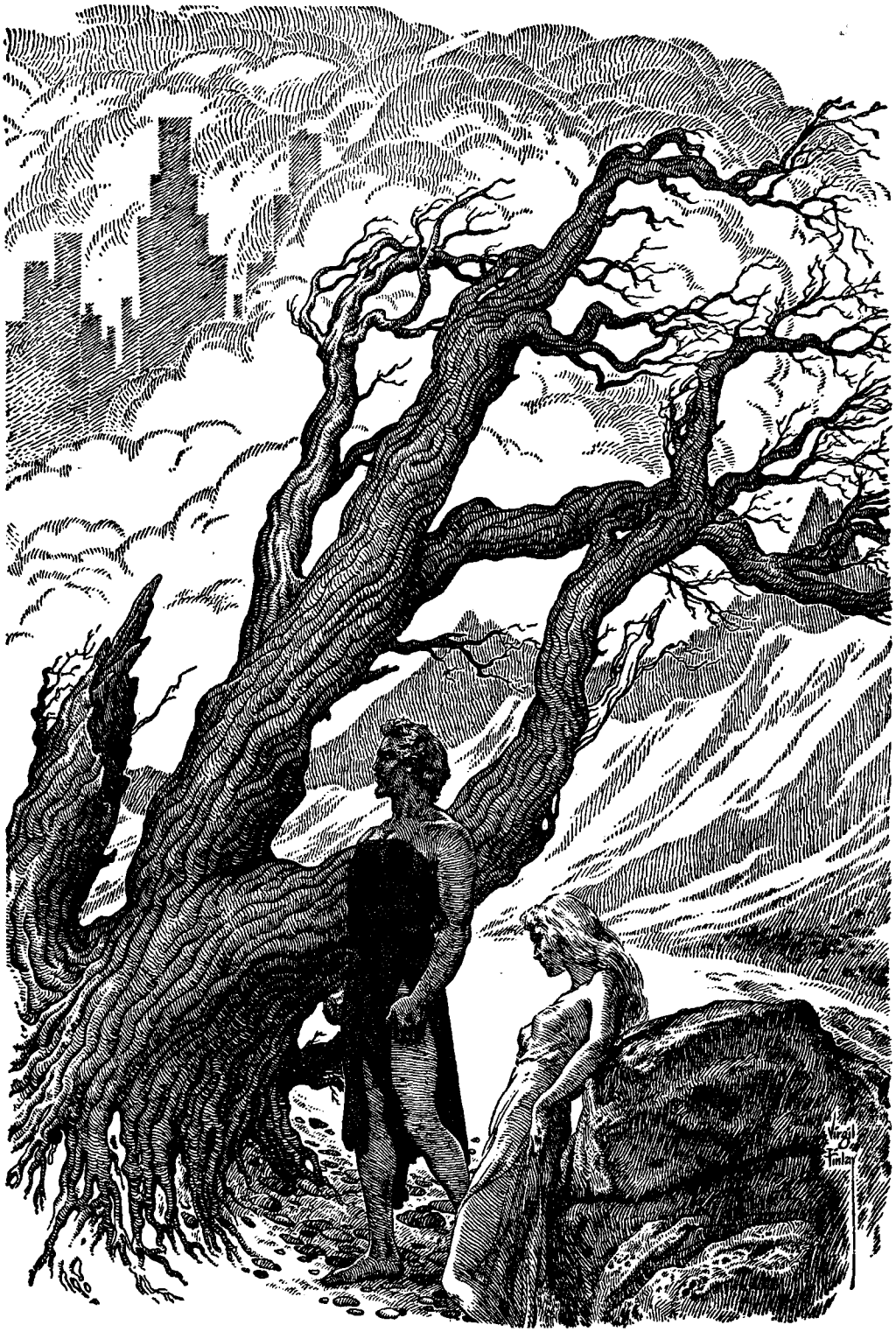

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have committed a greater crime, and for this crime there is no name. What punishment awaits us if it be discovered we know not, for no such crime has come in the memory of men and there are no laws to provide for it.

It is dark here. The flame of the candle stands still in the air. Nothing moves in this tunnel save our hand on the paper. We are alone here under the earth. It is a fearful word, alone. The laws say that none among men may be alone, ever and at any time, for this is the great transgression and the root of all evil. But we have broken many laws. And now there is nothing here save our one body, and it is strange to see only two legs stretched on the ground, and on the wall before us the shadow of our one head.

The walls are cracked and water runs upon them in thin threads without sound, black and glistening as blood. We stole the candle from the larder of the Home of the Street Sweepers. We shall be sentenced to ten years in the Palace of Corrective Detention if it be discovered. But this matters not. It matters only that the light is precious and we should not waste it to write when we need it for that work which is our crime. Nothing matters save the work, our secret, our evil, our precious work. Still, we must also write, for—may the Council have mercy upon us!—we wish to speak for once to no ears but our own.

Our name is Equality 7-2521, as it is written on the iron bracelet which all men wear on their left wrists with their names upon it. We are twenty-one years old. We are six feet tall, and this is a burden, for there are not many men who are six feet tall. Ever have the Teachers and the Leaders pointed to us and frowned and said: "There is evil in your bones, Equality 7-2521, for your body has grown beyond the bodies of your brothers." But we cannot change our bones nor our body.

We were born with a curse. It has always driven us to thoughts which are forbidden. It has always given us wishes which men may not wish. We know that we are evil, but there is no will in us and no power to resist it. This is our wonder and our secret fear, that we know and do not resist.

We strive to be like all our brother men, for all men must be alike. Over the portals of the Palace of the World Council, there are words cut in the marble, which we repeat to ourselves whenever we are tempted:

"We are one in all and all in one.
There are no men but only the great WE,
One, indivisible and forever."

We repeat this to ourselves, but it helps us not.

These words were cut long ago. There is green mould in the grooves of the letters and yellow streaks on the marble, which come from more years than men could count. And these words are the truth, for they are written on the Palace of the World Council, and the World Council is the body of all truth.

Thus has it been ever since the Great Rebirth, and farther back than that no memory can reach.

But we must never speak of the times before the Great Rebirth, else we are sentenced to three years in the Palace of Corrective Detention. It is only the Old Ones who whisper about it in the evenings, in the Home of the Useless. They whisper many strange things, of the towers which rose to the sky, in those Unmentionable Times, and of the wagons which moved without horses, and of the lights which burned without flame. But those times were evil. And those times passed away, when men saw the Great Truth which is this: that all men are one and that there is no will save the will of all men together.

All men are good and wise. It is only we, Equality 7-2521, we alone who were born with a curse. For we are not like our brothers. And as we look back upon our life, we see that it has ever been thus and that it has brought us step by step to our last, supreme transgression, our crime of crimes hidden here under the ground.

We remember the Home of the Infants where we lived till we were five years old, together with all the children of the City who had been born in the same year. The sleeping halls there were white and clean and bare of all things save one hundred beds. We were just like all our brothers then, save for the one transgression: we fought with our brothers. There are few offenses blacker than to fight with our brothers, at any age and for any cause whatsoever. The Council of the Home told us so, and of all the children that year, we were locked in the cellar most often.

WHEN we were five years old, we were sent to the Home of the Students, where there are ten wards, for our ten years of learning. Men must learn till they reach their fifteenth year. Then they go to work. In the Home of the Students we arose when the big bell rang in the tower and we went to our beds when it rang again. Before we removed our garments, we stood in the great sleeping hall, and we raised our right arms, and we said all together with the three Teachers at the head:

"We are nothing. Mankind is all. By the grace of our brothers are we allowed our lives. We exist through, by and for our brothers who are the State. Amen."

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Then we slept. The sleeping halls were white and clean and bare of all things save one hundred beds.

We, Equality 7-2521, were not happy in those years in the Home of the Students. It was not that the learning was too hard for us. It was that the learning was too easy. This is a great sin, to be born with a head which is too quick. It is not good to be different from our brothers, but it is evil to be superior to them. The Teachers told us so, and they frowned when they looked upon us.

So we fought against this curse. We tried to forget our lessons, but we always remembered. We tried not to understand what the Teachers taught, but we always understood it before the Teachers had spoken. We looked upon Union 5-3992, who were a pale boy with only half a brain, and we tried to say and do as they did, that we might be like them, like Union 5-3992, but somehow the Teachers knew that we were not. And we were lashed more often than all the other children.

The Teachers were just, for they had been appointed by the Councils, and the Councils are the voice of all justice, for they are the voice of all men. And if sometimes, in the secret darkness of our heart, we regret that which befell us on our fifteenth birthday, we know that it was through our own guilt. We had broken a law, for we had not paid heed to the words of our Teachers. The Teachers had said to us all:

"Dare not choose in your minds the work you would like to do when you leave the Home of the Students. You shall do that which the Council of Vocations shall prescribe for you. For the Council of Vocations knows in its great wisdom where you are needed by your brother men, better than you can know in your unworthy little minds. And if you are not needed by your brother men, there is no reason for you to burden the earth with your bodies."

We knew this well, in the years of our childhood, but our curse broke our will. We were guilty and we confess it here: we were guilty of the great Transgression of Preference. We preferred some work and some lessons to the others. We did not listen well to the history of all the Councils elected since the Great Rebirth. But we loved the Science of Things. We wished to know. We wished to know about all the things which make the earth around us. We asked so many questons that the Teachers forbade it.

We think that there are mysteries in the sky and under the water and in the plants which grow. But the Council of Scholars has said that there are no mysteries, and the Council of Scholars knows all things. And we learned much from our Teachers. We learned that the earth is flat and that the sun revolves around it, which causes the day and the night. We learned the names of all the winds which blow over the seas and push the sails of our great ships. We learned how to bleed men to cure them of all ailments.

We loved the Science of Things. And in the darkness, in the secret hour, when we awoke in the night and there were no brothers around us, but only their shapes in the beds and their snores, we closed our eyes, and we held our lips shut, and we stopped our breath, that no shudder might let our brothers see or hear or guess, and we thought that we wished to be sent to the Home of the Scholars when our time would come.

All the great modern inventions come from the Home of the Scholars, such as the newest one, which was found only a hundred years ago, of how to make candles from wax and string; also, how to make glass, which is put in our windows to protect us from the rain. To find these things, the Scholars must study the earth and learn from the rivers, from the sands, from the winds and the rocks. And if we went to the Home of the Scholars, we could learn from these also. We could ask questions of these, for they do not forbid questions.

And questions give us no rest. We know not why our curse makes us seek we know not what, ever and ever. But we cannot resist it. It whispers to us that there are great things on this earth of ours, and that we can know them if we try, and that we must know them. We ask, why must we know, but it has no answer to give us. We must know that we may know.

So we wished to be sent to the Home of the Scholars. We wished it so much that our hands trembled under the blankets in the night, and we bit our arm to stop that other pain which we could not endure. It was evil and we dared not face our brothers in the morning. For men may wish nothing for themselves. And we were punished when the Council of Vocations came to give us our life Mandates which tell those who reach their fifteenth year what their work is to be for the rest of their days.

The Council of Vocations came on the first day of spring, and they sat in the great hall. And we who were fifteen and all the Teachers came into the great hall. And the Council of Vocations sat on a high dais, and they had but two words to speak to each of the Students. They called the Students' names, and when the Students stepped before them, one after another, the Council said: "Carpenter" or "Doctor" or "Cook" or "Leader." Then each Student raised their right arm and said: "The will of our brothers be done."

Now if the Council has said "Carpenter" or "Cook," the Students so assigned go to work

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and they do not study any further. But if the Council has said "Leader," then those Students go into the Home of the Leaders, which is the greatest house in the City, for it has three stories. And there they study for many years, so that they may become candidates and be elected to the City Council and the State Council and the World Council—by a free and general vote of all men. But we wished not to be a Leader, even though it is a great honor. We wished to be a Scholar.

SO WE awaited our turn in the great hall and then we heard the Council of Vocations call our name: "Equality 7-2521." We walked to the dais, and our legs did not tremble, and we looked up at the Council. There were five members of the Council, three of the male gender and two of the female. Their hair was white and their faces were cracked as the clay of a dry river bed. They were old. They seemed older than the marble of the Temple of the World Council. They sat before us and they did not move. And we saw no breath to stir the folds of their white togas. But we knew that they were alive, for a finger of the hand of the oldest rose, pointed to us, and fell down again. This was the only thing which moved, for the lips of the oldest did not move as they said: "Street Sweeper."

We felt the cords of our neck grow tight as our head rose higher to look upon the faces of the Council, and we were happy. We knew we had been guilty, but now we had a way to atone for it. We would accept our Life Mandate, and we would work for our brothers, gladly and willingly, and we would erase our sin against them, which they did not know, but we knew. So we were happy, and proud of ourselves, and of our victory over ourselves. We raised our right arm and we spoke, and our voice was the clearest, the steadiest voice in the hall that day, and we said:

"The will of our brothers be done."

And we looked straight into the eyes of the Council, but their eyes were as cold blue glass buttons.

So we went into the Home of the Street Sweepers. It is a grey house on a narrow street. There is a sun-dial in its courtyard, by which the Council of the Home can tell the hours of the day and when to ring the bell. When the bell rings, we all arise from our beds. The sky is green and cold in our windows to the east. The shadow on the sun-dial marks off a half-hour while we dress and eat our breakfast in the dining hall, where there are five long tables with twenty clay plates and twenty clay cups on each table. Then we go to work in the streets of the City, with our brooms and our rakes. In five hours, when the sun is high, we return to the Home and we eat our midday meal, for which one half-hour is allowed. Then we go to work again. In five hours, the shadows are blue on the pavements, and the sky is blue with a deep brightness which is not bright. We come back to have our dinner, which lasts one hour. Then the bell rings and we walk in a straight column to one of the City Halls, for the Social Meeting. Other columns of men arrive from the Homes of the different Trades. The candles are lit, and the Councils of the different Homes stand in a pulpit, and they speak to us of our duties and of our brother men. Then visiting Leaders mount the pulpit and they read to us the speeches which were made in the City Council that day, for the City Council represents all men and all men must know. Then we sing hymns, the Hymn of Brotherhood, and the Hymn of Equality, and the Hymn of the Collective Spirit. The sky is a soggy purple when we return to the Home. Then the bell rings and we walk in a straight column to the City Theatre for three hours of Social Recreation. There a play is shown upon the stage, with two great choruses from the Home of the Actors, which speak and answer all together, in two great voices. The plays are about toil and how good it is. Then we walk back to the Home in a straight column. The sky is like a black sieve pierced by silver drops that tremble, ready to burst through. The moths beat against the street lanterns. We go to our beds and we sleep, till the bell rings again. The sleeping halls are white and clean and bare of all save one hundred beds.

Thus we have lived each day of four years, until two springs ago when our crime happened. Thus must all men live until they are forty. At forty, they are worn out. At forty, they are sent to the Home of the Useless, where the Old Ones live. The Old Ones do not work, for the State takes care of them. They sit in the sun in summer and they sit by the fire in winter. They do not speak often, for they are very weary. The Old Ones know that they are soon to die. When a miracle happens and some live to be forty-five, they are the Ancient Ones, and children stare at them when passing by the Home of the Useless. Such is to be our life, as that of all our brothers and of the brothers who came before us.

Such would have been our life, had we not committed our crime which changed all things for us. And it was our curse which drove us to our crime. We had been a good Street Sweeper and like all our brother Street Sweepers, save for our cursed wish to know. We looked too long at the stars at night, and at the trees and the earth. And when we cleaned the yard of the Home of the Scholars, we gathered the glass vials, the pieces of metal, the

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dried bones which they had discarded. We wished to keep these things and to study them, so we carried them to the City Cesspool. And then we made the discovery.

It was on a day of the spring before last. We Street Sweepers work in brigades of three, and we were with Union 5-3992, they of the half-brain, and with International 4-8814. Now Union 5-3992 are a sickly lad and sometimes they are stricken with convulsions, with their mouth frothing and their eyes turning white. But International 4-8818 are different. They are a tall, strong youth and their eyes are like fireflies, for there is laughter in their eyes. We cannot look upon International 4-8818 and not smile in answer. For this they were not liked in the Home of the Students, as it is not proper to smile without reason. And also they were not liked because they took pieces of coal and they drew pictures upon the walls, and they were pictures which made men laugh. But it is only our brothers in the Home of the Artists who are permitted to draw pictures, so International 4-8818 were sent to the Home of the Street Sweepers, like ourselves.

International 4-8818 and we are friends. This is an evil thing to say, for it is a transgression, the great Transgression of Preference, to love any among men better than any other, since we must love all men and all men are our friends. So International 4-8818 and we have never spoken of it. But we know. We know, when we look into each other's eyes. And when we look thus without words, we both know other things also, strange things for which there are no words, and these things frighten us.

So on that day of the spring before last, Union 5-3392 were stricken with convulsions on the edge of the City, near the City Theatre. We left them to lie in the shade of the Theatre tent and we went with International 4-8818 to finish our work. We came together to the great ravine behind the Theatre. It is empty save for trees and weeds. Beyond the ravine there is a plain, and beyond the plain there lies the Uncharted Forest, about which men must not think.

WE WERE gathering the papers and the rags which the wind had blown from the Theatre, when we saw an iron bar among the weeds. It was old and rusted by many rains. We pulled with all our strength, but we could not move it. So we called International 4-8818, and together we scraped the earth around the bar. Of a sudden the earth fell in before us, and we saw an old iron grill over a black hole.

International 4-8818 stepped back. But we pulled at the grill and it gave way. And then we saw iron rings as steps leading down a shaft into a darkness that was without any bottom.

"We shall go down," we said to International 4-8818.

"It is forbidden," they answered.

We said: "The Council does not know of this hole, so it cannot be forbidden."

And they answered: "Since the Council does not know of this hole, there can be no law permitting to enter it. And everything which is not permitted by law is forbidden."

But we said: "We shall go, none the less."

They were frightened, but they stood by and watched us go.

We hung on the iron rings with our hands and our feet. We could see nothing below us. And above us the hole open upon the sky grew smaller and smaller, till it came to be the size of a button. But still we went down. Then our foot touched the ground. We rubbed our eyes, for we could not see. Then our eyes became used to the darkness, but we could not believe what we saw.

No men known to us could have built this place, nor the men known to our brothers who lived before us, and yet it was built by men. It was a great tunnel. Its walls were hard and smooth to the touch; it felt like stone, but it was not stone. On the ground there were long thin tracks of iron, but it was not iron; it felt smooth and cold as glass. We knelt, and we crawled forward, our hand groping along the iron line to see where it would lead. But there was an unbroken night ahead. Only the iron tracks glowed through it, straight and white, calling us to follow. But we could not follow, for we were losing the puddle of light behind us. So we turned and we crawled back, our hand on the iron line. And our heart beat in our fingertips, without reason. And then we knew.

We knew suddenly that this place was left from the Unmentionable Times. So it was true, and those Times had been, and all the wonders of those Times. Hundreds upon hundreds of years ago men knew secrets which we have lost. And we thought: "This is a foul place. They are damned who touch the things of the Unmentionable Times." But our hand which followed the track, as we crawled, clung to the iron as if it would not leave it, as if the skin of our hand were thirsty and begging of the metal some secret fluid beating in its coldness.

We returned to the earth. International 4-8818 looked upon us and stepped back.

"Equality 7-2521," they said, "your face is white."

But we could not speak and we stood looking upon them.

They backed away, as if they dared not touch us. Then they smiled, but it was not a gay

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smile; it was lost and pleading. But still we could not speak. Then they said:

"We shall report our find to the City Council and both of us will be rewarded."

And then we spoke. Our voice was hard and there was no mercy in our voice. We said:

"We shall not report our find to the City Council. We shall not report it to any men."

They raised their hands to their ears, for never had they heard such words as these.

"International 4-8818," we asked, "will you report us to the Council and see us lashed to death before your eyes?"

They stood straight of a sudden and they answered:

"Rather would we die."

"Then," we said, "keep silent. This place is ours. This place belongs to us, Equality 7-2521, and to no other men on earth. And if ever we surrender it, we shall surrender our life with it also."

Then we saw that the eyes of International 4-8818 were full to the lids with tears they dared not drop. They whispered, and their voice trembled, so that their words lost all shape:

"The will of the Council is above all things, for it is the will of our brothers, which is holy. But if you wish it so, we shall obey you. Rather shall we be evil with you than good with all our brothers. May the Council have mercy upon both our hearts!"

Then we walked away together and back to the Home of the Street Sweepers. And we walked in silence.

Thus did it come to pass that each night, when the stars are high and the Street Sweepers sit in the City Theatre, we, Equality 7-2521, steal out and run through the darkness to our place. It is easy to leave the Theatre; when the candles are blown and the Actors came onto the stage, no eyes can see us as we crawl under our seat and under the cloth of the tent. Later, it is easy to steal through the shadows and fall in line next to International 4-8818, as the column leaves the Theatre. It is dark in the streets and there are no men about, for no men may walk through the City when they have no mission to walk there. Each night, we run to the ravine, and we remove the stones which we have piled upon the iron grill to hide it from men. Each night, for three hours, we are under the earth, alone.

We have stolen candles from the Home of the Street Sweepers, we have stolen flints and knives and paper, and we have brought them to this place. We have stolen glass vials and powders and acids from the Home of the Scholars. Now we sit in the tunnel for three hours each night and we study. We melt strange metals, and we mix acids, and we cut open the bodies of the animals which we find in the City Cesspool. We have built an oven of the bricks we gathered in the streets. We burn the wood we find in the ravine. The fire flickers in the oven, and blue shadows dance upon the walls, and there is no sound of men to disturb us.

We have stolen manuscripts. This is a great offense. Manuscripts are precious, for our brothers in the Home of the Clerks spend one year to copy one single script in their clear handwriting. Manuscripts are rare and they are kept in the Home of the Scholars. We sit under the earth and we read the stolen scripts. Two years have passed since we found this place. And in these two years we have learned more than we had learned in the ten years of the Home of the Students.

We have learned things which are not in the scripts. We have solved secrets of which the Scholars have no knowledge. We have come to see how great is the unexplored, and many lifetimes will not bring us to the end of our quest. But we wish no end to our quest. We wish nothing, save to be alone and to learn, and to feel as if with each day our sight were growing sharper than the hawk's and clearer than rock crystal.

Strange are the ways of evil. We are false in the faces of our brothers. We are defying the will of our Councils. We alone; of the thousands who walk this earth, we alone in this hour are doing a work which has no purpose save that we wish to do it. The evil of our crime is not for the human mind to probe. The nature of our punishment, if it be discovered, is not for the human heart to ponder. Never, not in the memory of the Ancient Ones' Ancients, never have men done that which we are doing.

And yet there is no shame in us and no regret. We say to ourselves that we are a wretch and a traitor. But we feel no burden upon our spirit and no fear in our heart. And it seems to us that our spirit is clear as a lake troubled by no eyes save those of the sun. And in our heart—strange are the ways of evil!—in our heart there is the first peace we have known in twenty years.

Chapter Two

LIBERTY 5-3000 . . . Liberty five-three-thousand . . . Liberty 5-3000. . .

We wish to write this name. We wish to speak it, but we dare not speak it above a whisper. For men are forbidden to take notice of women, and women are forbidden to take notice of men. But we think of one among women, they whose name is Liberty 5-3000, and we think of no others.

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The women who have been assigned to work the soil live in the Homes of the Peasants beyond the City. Where the City ends there is a great road winding off to the north, and we Street Sweepers must keep this road clean to the first milepost. There is a hedge along the road, and beyond the hedge lie the fields. The fields are black and ploughed, and they lie like a great fan before us, with their furrows gathered in some hand beyond the sky, spreading forth from that hand, opening wide apart as they come toward us, like black pleats that sparkle with thin, green spangles. Women work in the fields, and their white tunics in the wind are like the wings of sea-gulls beating over the black soil.

And there it was that we saw Liberty 5-3000 walking along the furrows. Their body was straight and thin as a blade of iron. Their eyes were dark and hard and glowing, with no fear in them, no kindness and no guilt. Their hair was golden as the sun—their hair flew in the wind, shining and wild, as if it defied men to restrain it. They threw seeds from their hand as if they deigned to fling a scornful gift, and the earth was as a beggar under their feet.

We stood still; for the first time did we know fear, and then pain. And we stood still that we might not spill this pain more precious than pleasure.

Then we heard a voice from the others call their name: "Liberty 5-3000," and they turned and walked back. Thus we learned their name, and we stood watching them go, till their white tunic was lost in the blue mist.

And the following day, as we came to the northern road, we kept our eyes upon Liberty 5-3000 in the field. And each day thereafter we knew the illness of waiting for our hour on the northern road. And there we looked at Liberty 5-3000 each day. We know not whether they looked at us also, but we think they did.

Then one day they came close to the hedge, and suddenly they turned to us. They turned in a whirl and the movement of their body stopped, as if slashed off, as suddenly as it had started. They stood still as a stone, and they looked straight upon us, straight into our eyes. There was no smile on their face, and no welcome. But their face was taut, and their eyes were dark. Then they turned as swiftly, and they walked away from us.

But the following day, when we came to the road, they smiled. They smiled to us and for us. And we smiled in answer. Their head fell back, and their arms fell, as if their arms and their thin white neck were stricken suddenly with a great lassitude. They were not looking upon us, but upon the sky. Then they glanced at us over their shoulder, and we felt as if a hand had touched our body, slipping softly from our lips to our feet.

Every morning thereafter, we greeted each other with our eyes. We dared not speak. It is a transgression to speak to men of other trades, save in groups at the Social Meetings. But once, standing at the hedge, we raised our hand to our forehead and then moved it slowly, palm down, toward Liberty 5-3000. Had the others seen it, they could have guessed nothing, for it looked only as if we were shading our eyes from the sun. But Liberty 5-3000 saw it and understood. They raised their hand to their forehead and moved it as we had. Thus, each day, we greet Liberty 5-3000, and they answer, and no men can suspect.

We do not wonder at this new sin of ours. It is our second Transgression of Preference, for we do not think of all our brothers, as we must, but only of one, and their name is Liberty 5-3000. We do not know why we think of them. We do not know why, when we think of them, we feel of a sudden that the earth is good and that it is not a burden to live.

We do not think of them as Liberty 5-3000 any longer. We have given them a name in our thoughts. We call them the Golden One. But it is a sin to give men names which distinguish them from other men. Yet we call them the Golden One, for they are not like the others. The Golden One are not like the others.

And we take no heed of the law which says that men may not think of women, save at the Time of Mating. This is the time each spring when all the men older than twenty and all the women older than eighteen are sent for one night to the City Palace of Mating. And each of the men have one of the women assigned to them by the Council of Eugenics. Children are born each winter, but women never see their children and children never know their parents.

WE HAD broken so many laws, and today we have broken one more. Today, we spoke to the Golden One.

The other women were far off in the field, when we stopped at the hedge by the side of the road. The Golden One were kneeling alone at the moat which runs through the field. And the drops of water falling from their hands, as they raised the water to their lips, were like sparks of fire in the sun. Then the Golden One saw us, and they did not move, kneeling there, looking at us, and circles of light played upon their white tunic, from the sun on the water of the moat, and one sparkling drop fell from a finger of their hand held as frozen in the air.

Then the Golden One rose and walked to

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the hedge, as if they had heard a command in our eyes. The two other Street Sweepers of our brigade were a hundred paces away down the road. And we thought that International 4-8818 would not betray us, and Union 5-3992 would not understand. So we looked straight upon the Golden One, and we saw the shadows of their lashes on their white cheeks and the sparks of sun on their lips. And we said:

"You are beautiful, Liberty 5-3000."

Their face did not move and they did not avert their eyes. Only their eyes grew wider, and there was triumph in their eyes, and it was not triumph over us, but over things we could not guess.

They they asked:

"What is your name?"

"Equality 7-2521," we answered.

"You are not one of our brothers, Equality 7-2521, for we do not with you to be."

We cannot say what they meant, for there are no words for their meaning, but we know it without words and we knew it then.

"No," we answered, "nor are you one of our sisters."

"If you see us among scores of women, will you look upon us?"

"We shall look upon you, Liberty 5-3000, if we see you among all the women of the earth."

Then they asked:

"Are Street Sweepers sent to different parts of the City or do they always work in the same places?"

"They always work in the same places," we answered, "and no one will take this road away from us."

"Your eyes," they said, "are not like the eyes of any among men."

And suddenly, without cause for the thought which came to us, we felt cold, cold to our stomach.

"How old are you?" we asked.

They understood our thought, for they lowered their eyes for the first time.

"Seventeen," they whispered.

And we sighed, as if a burden had been taken from us, for we had been thinking without reason of the Palace of Mating. And we thought that we would not let the Golden One be sent to the Palace. How to prevent it, how to bar the will of the Council, we knew not, but we knew suddenly that we would. Only we do not know why such thought came to us, for these ugly matters bear no relation to us and the Golden One. What relation can they bear?

Still, without reason, as we stood there by the hedge, we felt our lips drawn tight with hatred, a sudden hatred for all our brother men. And the Golden One saw it and smiled slowly, and there was in their smile the first sadness we had seen in them. We think that in the wisdom of women the Golden One had understood more than we can understand.

Then three of the sisters in the field appeared, coming toward the road, so the Golden One walked away from us. They took the bag of seeds, and they threw the seeds into the furrows of earth as they walked away. But the seeds flew wildly, for the hand of the Golden One was trembling.

Yet as we walked back to the Home of the Street Sweepers, we felt that we wanted to sing, without reason. So we were reprimanded tonight, in the dining hall, for without knowing it we had begun to sing aloud some tune we had never heard. But it is not proper to sing without reason, save at the Social Meetings.

"We are singing because we are happy," we answered the one of the Home Council who reprimanded us.

"Indeed you are happy," they answered. "How else can men be when they live for their brothers?"

And now, sitting here in our tunnel, we wonder about these words. It is forbidden, not to be happy. For, as it has been explained to us, men are free and the earth belongs to them; and all things on earth belong to all men; and the will of all men together is good for all; and so all men must be happy.

Yet as we stand at night in the great hall, removing our garments for sleep, we look upon our brothers and we wonder. The heads of our brothers are bowed. The eyes of our brothers are dull, and never do they look one another in the eyes. The shoulders of our brothers are hunched, and their muscles are drawn, as if their bodies were shrinking and wished to shrink out of sight. And a word steals into our mind, as we look upon our brothers, and that word is fear.

There is fear hanging in the air of the sleeping halls, and in the air of the streets. Fear walks through the City, fear without name, without shape. All men feel it and none dare to speak.

We feel it also, when we are in the Home of the Street Sweepers. But there, in our tunnel, we feel it no longer. The air is pure under the ground. There is no odor of men. And these three hours give us strength for our hours above the ground.

Our body is betraying us, for the Council of the Home looks with suspicion upon us. It is not good to feel too much joy nor to be glad that our body lives. For we matter not and it must not matter to us whether we live or die, which is to be as our brothers will it. But we, Equality 7-2521, are glad to be living. If this is a vice, then we wish no virtue.

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Yet our brothers are not like us. All is not well with our brothers. There are Fraternity 2-5503, a quiet boy with wise, kind eyes, who cry suddenly, without reason, in the midst of day or night, and their body shakes with sobs they cannot explain. There are Solidarity 9-6347, who are a bright youth, without fear in the day; but they scream in their sleep, and they scream: "Help us! Help us! Help us!" into the night, in a voice which chills our bones, but the Doctors cannot cure Solidarity 9-6347.

And as we all undress at night, in the dim light of our candles, our brothers are silent, for they dare not speak the thoughts of their minds. For all must agree with all, and they cannot know if their thoughts are the thoughts of all, and so they fear to speak. And they are glad when the candles are blown for the night. But we, Equality 7-2521, look through the window upon the sky, and there is peace in the sky, and cleanliness, and dignity. And beyond the City there lies the plain, and beyond the plain, black upon the black sky, there lies the Uncharted Forest.

WE DO not wish to look upon the Uncharted Forest. We do not wish to think of it. But ever do our eyes return to that black patch upon the sky. Men never enter the Uncharted Forest, for there is no power to explore it and no path to lead among its ancient trees which stand as guards of fearful streets. It is whispered that once or twice in a hundred years, one among the men of the City escape alone and run to the Uncharted Forest, without call or reason. These men do not return. They perish from hunger and from the claws of the wild beasts which roam the Forest. But our Councils say that this is only a legend. We have heard that there are many Uncharted Forests over the land, among the Cities. And it is whispered that they have grown over the ruins of the Unmentionable Times. The trees have swallowed the ruins, and the bones under the ruins, and all the things which perished.

And as we look upon the Uncharted Forest far in the night, we think of the secrets of the Unmentionable Times. And we wonder how it came to pass that these secrets were lost to the world. We have heard the legends of the great fighting, in which many men fought on one side and only a few on the other. These few were the Evil Ones and they were conquered. Then great fires raged over the land. And in these fires the Evil Ones and all the things made by the Evil Ones were burned. And the fire which is called the Dawn of the Great Rebirth, was the Script Fire where all the scripts of the Evil Ones were burned, and with them all the words of the Evil Ones. Great Mountains of flame stood in the squares of the Cities for three months. Then came the Great Rebirth.

The words of the Evil Ones: . . . The Words of the Unmentionable Times. . . What are the words which we have lost?

May the Council have mercy upon us! We had no wish to write such a question, and we knew not what we were doing till we had written it. We shall not ask this question and we shall not think it. We shall not call death upon our head.

And yet. . . And yet. . .

There is some word, one single word, one single word which is not in the language of men, but which had been. And this is the Unspeakable Word, which no men may speak nor hear. But sometimes, and it is rare, sometimes, somewhere, one among men find that word. They find it upon scraps of old manuscripts or cut into the fragments of ancient stones. But when they speak it they are put to death. There is no crime punished by death in this world, save this one crime of speaking the Unspeakable Word.

We have seen one of such men burned alive in the square of the City. And it was a sight that has stayed with us through the years, and it haunts us, and follows us, and it gives us no rest. We were a child then, ten years old. And we stood in the great square with all the children and all the men of the City, sent to behold the burning. They brought the Transgressor out into the square and they led them to the pyre. They had torn out the tongue of the Transgressor, so that they could speak no longer. The Transgressor were young and tall. They had hair of gold and eyes blue as morning. They walked to the pyre, and their step did not falter. And of all the faces which shrieked and screamed and spat curses upon them, theirs was the calmest and the happiest face.

As the chains were wound over their body at the stake, and a flame set to the pyre, the Transgressor looked upon the City. There was a thin thread of blood running from the corner of their mouth, but their lips were smiling. And a monstrous thought came to us then, which has never left us. We had heard of Saints. There are the Saints of Labor, and the Saints of the Councils, and the Saints of the Great Rebirth. But we had never seen a Saint nor what the likeness of a Saint should be. And we thought then, standing in the square, that the likeness of a Saint was the face we saw before us in the flames, the face of the Transgressor of the Unspeakable Word.

As the flames rose, a thing happened which no eyes saw but ours, else we would not be living today. Perhaps it had only seemed to us.

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But it seemed to us that the eyes of the Transgressor had chosen us from the crowd and were looking straight upon us. There was no pain in their eyes and no knowledge of the agony of their body. There was only joy in them, and pride, a pride holier than it is fit for human pride to be. And it seemed as if these eyes were trying to tell us something through the flames, to send into our eyes some word without sound. And it seemed as if these eyes were begging us to gather that word and not to let it go from us and from the earth. But the flames rose and we could not guess the word. . .

What—even if we have to burn for it like the Saint of the pyre—what is the Unspeakable Word?

Chapter Three

WE, EQUALITY 7-2521, have discovered a new power of nature. We have discovered it alone, and we are alone to know it.

It is said. Now let us be lashed for it, if we must. The Council of Scholars has said that we all know the things which are not known by all do not exist. But we think that the Council of Scholars is blind. The secrets of this earth are not for all men to see, but only for those who will seek them. We know, for we have found a secret unknown to all our brothers.

We know not what this power is nor whence it comes. But we know its nature, we have watched it and worked with it. We saw it first two years ago. One night, we were cutting open the body of a dead frog when we saw its leg jerking. It was dead, yet it moved. Some power unknown to men was making it move. We could not understand it. Then, after many tests, we found the answer. The frog had been hanging on a wire of copper; and it had been the metal of our knife which had sent a strange power to the copper through the brine of the frog's body. We put a piece of copper and a piece of zinc into a jar of brine, we touched a wire to them, and there, under our fingers, was a miracle which had never occurred before, a new miracle and a new power.

This discovery haunted us. We followed it in preference to all our studies. We worked with it, we tested it in more ways than we can describe, and each step was as another miracle unveiling before us. We came to know that we had found the greatest power on earth. For it defies all the laws known to men. It makes the needle move and turn on the compass which we stole from the Home of the Scholars; but we had been taught, when still a child, that the loadstone points to the north and that this is a law which nothing can change; yet our new power defies all laws. We found that it causes lightning, and never have men known what causes lightning. In thunderstorms, we raised a tall rod of iron by the side of our hole, and we watched it from below. We have seen the lightning strike it again and again. And now we know that metal draws the power of the sky, and that metal can be made to give it forth.

We have built strange things with this discovery of ours. We used for it the copper wires which we found here under the ground. We have walked the length of our tunnel, with a candle lighting the way. We could go no farther than half a mile, for earth and rock had fallen at both ends. But we gathered all the things we found and we brought them to our work place. We found strange boxes with bars of metal inside, with many cords and strands and coils of metal. We found wires that led to strange little globes of glass on the walls; they contained threads of metal thinner than a spider's web.

These things help us in our work. We do not understand them, but we think that the men of the Unmentionable Times had known our power of the sky, and these things had some relation to it. We do not know, but we shall learn. We cannot stop now, even though it frightens us that we are alone in our knowledge.

No single one can possess greater wisdom than the many Scholars who are elected by all men for their wisdom. Yet we can. We do. We have fought against saying it, but now it is said. We do not care. We forget all men, all laws and all things save our metals and our wires. So much is still to be learned! So long a road lies before us, and what care we if we must travel it alone!

Chapter Four

MANY days passed before we could speak to the Golden One again. But then came the day when the sky turned white, as if the sun had burst and spread its flame in the air, and the fields lay still without breath, and the dust of the road was white in the glow. So the women of the field were weary, and they tarried over their work, and they were far from the road when we came. But the Golden One stood alone at the hedge, waiting. We stopped and we saw that their eyes, so hard and scornful to the world, were looking at us as if they would obey any word we might speak.

And we said:

"We have given you a name in our thoughts, Liberty 5-3000."

"What is our name?" they asked.

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Terror struck the men of the Council.

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"The Golden One."

"Nor do we call you Equality 7-2521 when we think of you."

"What name have you given us?"

They looked straight into our eyes and they held their head high and they answered:

"The Unconquered."

For a long time we could not speak. Then we said:

"Such thoughts as these are forbidden, Golden One."

"But you think such thoughts as these and you wish us to think them."

We looked into their eyes and we could not lie.

"Yes," we whispered, and they smiled, and then we said, "Our dearest one, do not obey us."

They stepped back, and their eyes were wide and still.

"Speak these words again," they whispered.

"Which words?" we asked. But they did not answer, and we knew it.

"Our dearest one," we whispered.

Never have men said this to women.

The head of the Golden One bowed slowly, and they stood still before us, their arms at their sides, the palms of their hands turned to us, as if their body were delivered in submission to our eyes. And we could not speak.

Then they raised their head, and they spoke simply and gently, as if they wished us to forget some anxiety of their own.

"The day is hot," they said, "and you have worked for many hours and you must be weary."

"No," we answered.

"It is cooler in the fields," they said, "and there is water to drink. Are you thirsty?"

"Yes," we answered, "but we cannot cross the hedge."

"We shall bring the water to you," they said.

Then they knelt by the moat, they gathered water in their two hands, they rose and they held the water out to our lips.

We do not know if we drank that water. We only knew suddenly that their hands were empty, but we were still holding our lips to their hands, and that they knew it, but did not move.

We raised our head and stepped back. For we did not understand what had made us do this, and we were afraid to understand it.

And the Golden One stepped back, and stood looking at their hands in wonder. Then the Golden one moved away, even though no others were coming, and they moved stepping back, as if they could not turn from us, their arms bent before them, as if they could not lower their hands.

Chapter Five

WE MADE it. We created it. We brought it forth from the night of the ages. We alone. Our hands. Our mind. Ours alone and only.

We know not what we are saying. Our head is reeling. We look upon the light which we have made. We shall be forgiven for anything we say tonight. . .

Tonight, after more days and trials than we can count, we finished building a strange thing, from the remains of the Unmentionable Times, a box of glass, devised to give forth the power of the sky of greater strength than we had ever achieved before. And when we put our wires to this box, when we closed the current—the wire glowed. It came to life, it turned red, and a circle of light lay on the stone before us.

We stood, and we held our heads in our hands. We could not conceive of that which we had created. We had touched no flint, made no fire. Yet here was light, light that came from nowhere, light from the heart of metal.

We blew out the candle. Darkness swallowed us. There was nothing left around us, nothing save night and a thin thread of flame in it, as a crack in the wall of a prison. We stretched our hands to the wire, and we saw our fingers in the red glow. We could not see our body nor feel it, and in that moment nothing existed save our two hands over a wire glowing in a black abyss.

Then we thought of the meaning of that which lay before us. We can light our tunnel, and the City, and all the Cities of the world with nothing save metal and wires. We can give our brothers a new light, cleaner and brighter than any they have ever known. The power of the sky can be made to do men's bidding. There are no limits to its secrets and its might, and it can be made to grant us anything if we but choose to ask.

Then we knew what we must do. Our discovery is too great for us to waste our time in sweeping the streets. We must not keep our secret to ourselves, nor buried under the ground. We must bring it into the sight of all men. We need all our time, we need the work rooms of the Home of the Scholars, we want the help of our brother Scholars and their wisdom joined to ours. There is so much work ahead for all of us, for all the Scholars of the world.

In a month, the World Council of Scholars is to meet in our City. It is a great Council, to which the wisest of all the lands are elected, and it meets once a year in the different Cities of the earth. We shall go to this Council and

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we shall lay before them, as our gift, the glass box with the power of the sky. We shall confess everything to them. They will see, understand and forgive. For our gift is greater than our transgression. They will explain it to the Council of Vocations, and we shall be assigned to the Home of the Scholars. This has never been done before, but neither has a gift such as ours ever been offered to men.

We must wait. We must guard our tunnel as we have never guarded it before. For should any men save the Scholars learn of our secret, they would not understand it, nor would they believe us. They would see nothing, save our crime of working alone, and they would destroy us and our light. We care not about our body, but our light is. . .

Yes, we do care. For the first time do we care about our body. For this wire is as a part of our body, as a vein torn from us, glowing with our blood. Are we proud of this thread of metal, or of our hands which made it, or is there a line to divide these two?

We stretch out our arms. For the first time do we know how strong our arms are. And a strange thought comes to us: we wonder, for the first time in our life, what we look like. Men never see their own faces and never ask their brothers about it, for it is evil to have concern for their own faces or bodies. But tonight, for a reason we cannot fathom, we wish it were possible to us to know the likeness of our own person.

Chapter Six

WE HAVE not written for thirty days. For thirty days we have not been here, in our tunnel. We had been caught.

It happened on that night when we wrote last. We forgot, that night, to watch the sand in the glass which tells us when three hours have passed and it is time to return to the City Theatre. When we remembered it, the sand had run out.

We hastened to the Theatre. But the big tent stood grey and silent against the sky. The streets of the City lay before us, dark and empty. If we went back to hide in our tunnel, we would be found and our light found with us. So we walked to the Home of the Street Sweepers.

When the Council of the Home questioned us, we looked upon the faces of the Council, but there was no curiosity in those faces, and no anger, and no mercy. So when the oldest of them asked us: "Where have you been?", we thought of our glass box and of our light, and we forgot all else. And we answered:

"We will not tell you."

The oldest did not question us further. They turned to the two youngest, and said, and their voice was bored:

"Take our brother Equality 7-2521 to the Palace of Corrective Detention. Lash them until they tell."

So we were taken to the Stone Room under the Palace of Corrective Detention. This room has no windows and it is empty save for an iron post. Two men stood by the post, naked but for leather aprons and leather hoods over their faces. Those who had brought us departed, leaving us to the two Judges who stood in a corner of the room. The Judges were small, thin men, grey and bent. They gave the signal to the two strong hooded ones.

They tore our clothes from our body, they threw us down upon our knees and they tied our hands to the iron post.

The first blow of the lash felt as if our spine had been cut in two. The second blow stopped the first, and for a second we felt nothing, then the pain struck us in our throat and fire ran in our lungs without air. But we did not cry out.

The lash whistled like a singing wind. We tried to count the blows, but we lost count. We knew that the blows were falling upon our back. Only we felt nothing upon our back any longer. A flaming grill kept dancing before our eyes, and we thought of nothing save that grill, a grill, a grill of red squares, and then we knew that we were looking at the squares of the iron grill in the door, and there were also the squares of stone on the walls, and the squares which the lash was cutting upon our back, crossing and re-crossing itself in our flesh.

Then we saw a fist before us. It knocked our chin up, and we saw the red froth of our mouth on the withered fingers, and the Judge asked:

"Where have you been?"

But we jerked our head away, hid our face upon our tied hands, and bit our lips.

The lash whistled again. We wondered who was sprinkling burning coal dust upon the floor, for we saw drops of red twinkling on the stones around us.

Then we knew nothing, save two voices snarling steadily, one after the other, even though we knew they were speaking many minutes apart:

"Where have you been where have you been where have you been where have you been. . ."

And our lips moved, but the sound trickled back into our throat, and the sound was only:

"The light . . . the light . . . the light . . ."

Then we knew nothing.

We opened our eyes, lying on our stomach on the brick floor of a cell. We looked upon

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two hands lying far before us on the bricks. and we moved them, and we knew that they were our hands. But we could not move our body. Then we smiled, for we thought of the light and that we had not betrayed it.

We lay in our cell for many days. The door opened twice each day, once for the men who brought us bread and water, and once for the Judges. Many Judges came to our cell, first the humblest and then the most honored Judges of the City. They stood before us in their white togas, and they asked:

"Are you ready to speak?"

But we shook our head, lying before them on the floor. And they departed.

We counted each day and each night as it passed. Then, tonight, we knew that we must escape. For tomorrow the World Council of Scholars is to meet in our City.

It was easy to escape from the Palace of Corrective Detention. The locks are old on the doors and there are no guards about. There is no reason to have guards, for men have never defied the Councils so far as to escape from whatever place they were ordered to be. Our body is healthy and strength returns to it speedily. We lunged against the door and it gave way. We stole through the dark passages, and through the dark streets, and down into our tunnel.

We lit the candle and we saw that our place had not been found and nothing had been touched. And our glass box stood before us on the cold oven, as we had left it. What matter they now, the scars upon our back!

Tomorrow, in the full light of the day, we shall take our box, and leave our tunnel open, and walk through the streets to the Home of the Scholars. We shall put before them the greatest gift ever offered to men. We shall tell them the truth. We shall hand to them, as our confession, these pages we have written. We shall join our hands to theirs, and we shall work together, with the power of the sky, for the glory of mankind. Our blessing upon you, our brothers! Tomorrow, you will take us back into your fold and we shall be an outcast no longer. Tomorrow we shall be one of you again. Tomorrow. . .

Chapter Seven

IT IS dark here in the forest. The leaves rustle over our head, black against the last gold of the sky. The moss is soft and warm. We shall sleep on this moss for many nights, till the beasts of the forest come to tear our body. We have no bed now, save the moss, and no future, save the beasts.

We are old now, yet we were young this morning, when we carried our glass box through the streets of the City to the Home of the Scholars. No men stopped us, for there were none about from the Palace of Corrective Detention, and the others knew nothing. No men stopped us at the gate; we walked through empty passages and into the great hall where the World Council of Scholars sat in solemn meeting.

We saw nothing as we entered, save the sky in the great windows, blue and glowing. Then we saw the Scholars who sat around a long table; they were as shapeless clouds huddled at the rise of the great sky. There were men whose famous names we knew, and others from distant lands whose names we had not heard. We saw a great painting on the wall over their heads, of the twenty illustrious men who had invented the candle.

All the heads of the Council turned to us as we entered. These great and wise of the earth did not know what to think of us, and they looked upon us with wonder and curiosity, as if we were a miracle. It is true that our tunic was torn and stained with brown stains which had been blood. We raised our right arm and we said:

"Our greeting to you, our honored brothers of the World Council of Scholars!"

Then Collective o-0009, the oldest and wisest of the Council, spoke and asked:

"Who are you, our brother? For you do not look like a Scholar."

"Our name is Equality 7-2521," we answered, "and we are a Street Sweeper of this City."

Then it was as if a great wind had stricken the hall, for all the Scholars spoke at once, and they were angry and frightened.

"A Street Sweeper! A Street Sweeper walking in upon the World Council of Scholars! It is not to be believed! It is against all the rules and all the laws!"

But we knew how to stop them.

"Our brothers!" we said. "We matter not, nor our transgression. It is only our brother men who matter. Give no thought to us, for we are nothing, but listen to our words, for we bring you a gift such as has never been brought to men. Listen to us, for we hold the future of mankind in our hands."

Then they listened.

We placed our glass box upon the table before them. We spoke of it, and of our long quest, and of our tunnel, and of our escape from the Palace of Corrective Detention. Not a hand moved in that hall, as we spoke, nor an eye. Then we put the wires to the box, and they all bent forward and sat still, watching. And we stood still, our eyes upon the wire. And slowly, slowly as a flush of blood, a red flame trembled in the wire. Then the wire glowed.

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But terror struck the men of the Council. They leapt to their feet, they ran from the table, and they stood pressed against the wall, huddled together, seeking the warmth of one another's bodies to give them courage.

We looked upon them and we laughed and said:

"Fear nothing, our brothers. There is a great power in these wires, but this power is tamed. It is yours. We give it to you."

Still they would not move.

"We give you the power of the sky!" we cried. "We give you the key to the earth! Take it, and let us be one of you, the humblest among you. Let us all work together and harness this power, and make it ease the toil of men. Let us throw away our candles and our torches. Let us flood our cities with light. Let us bring a new light to men!"

But they looked upon us, and suddenly we were afraid. For their eyes were still, and small, and evil.

"Our brothers!" we cried. "Have you nothing to say to us?"

Then Collective 0-0009 moved forward. They moved to the table and the others followed.

"Yes," said Collective 0-0009, "we have much to say to you."

The sound of their voice brought silence to the hall and to the beat of our heart.

"Yes," said Collective 0-0009, "we have much to say to a wretch who have broken all the laws and who boast of their infamy! How dared you think that your mind held greater wisdom than the minds of your brothers? And if the Councils had decreed that you should be a Street Sweeper, how dared you think that you could be of greater use to men than in sweeping the streets?"

"How dared you, gutter cleaner," spoke Fraternity 9-3452, "to hold yourself as one alone and with the thoughts of the one and not of the many?"

"You shall be burned at the stake," said Democracy 4-6958.

"No, they shall be lashed," said Unanimity 7-3304, "till there is nothing left under the lashes."

"No," said Collective 0-0009, "we cannot decide upon this, our brothers. No such crime has ever been committed, and it is not for us to judge. Nor for any small Council. We shall deliver this creature to the World Council itself and let their will be done."

We looked upon them, then, and we pleaded:

"Our brothers! You are right. Let the will of the Council be done upon our body. We do not care. But the light? What will you do with the light?"

COLLECTIVE 0-0009 looked upon us, and they smiled.

"So you think that you have found a new power," said Collective 0-0009. "Do all your brothers think that?"

"No," we answered.

"What is not thought by all men cannot be true," said Collective 0-0009.

"You have worked on this alone?" asked International 1-5537.

"Yes," we answered.

"What is not done collectively cannot be good," said International 1-5537.

"Many men in the Homes of the Scholars have had strange new ideas in the past," said Solidarity 8-1164, "but when the majority of their brother Scholars voted against them, they abandoned their ideas, as all men must."

"This box is useless," said Alliance 6-7349.

"Should it be what they claim of it," said Harmony 9-2642, "then it would bring ruin to the Department of Candles. The Candle is a great boon to mankind, as approved by all men. Therefore it cannot be destroyed by the whim of one."

"This would wreck the Plans of the World Council," said Unanimity 2-9913, "and without the Plans of the World Council the sun cannot rise. It took fifty years to secure the approval of all the Councils for the Candle, and to decide upon the number needed, and to re-fit the Plans so as to make candles instead of torches. This touched upon thousands and thousands of men working in scores of States. We cannot alter the Plans again so soon."

"And if this should lighten the toil of men," said Similarity 5-0306, "then it is a great evil, for men have no cause to exist save in toiling for other men."

Then Collective 0-0009 rose and pointed to our box.

"This thing," they said, "must be destroyed."

And all the others cried as one:

"It must be destroyed."

Then we leaped to the table.

We seized our box, we shoved them aside, and we ran to the window. We turned and we looked at them for the last time, and a rage, such as it is not fit for humans to know, choked our voice in our throat.

"You fools!" we cried. "You fools! You thrice-damned fools!"

We swung our fist through the window pane, and we leapt out in a ringing rain of glass.

We fell, but we never let the box fall from our hands. Then we ran. We ran blindly, and men and houses streaked past us in a torrent without shape. And the road seemed not to be flat before us, but as if it were leaping up to meet us, and we waited for the earth to rise

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and strike us in the face. But we ran. We knew not where we were going. We knew only that we must run, run to the end of the world, to the end of our days.

Then we knew suddenly that we were lying on a soft earth and that we had stopped. Trees taller than we had ever seen before stood over us in a great silence. Then we knew. We were in the Uncharted Forest. We had not thought of coming here, but our legs had carried our wisdom, and our legs had brought us to the Uncharted Forest against our will.

Our glass box lay beside us. We crawled to it, we fell upon it, our face in our arms, and we lay still.

We lay thus for a long time. Then we rose, we took our box and walked on into the forest.

It mattered not where we went. We knew that men would not follow us, for they never enter the Uncharted Forest. We had nothing to fear from them. The forest disposes of its own victims. This gave us no fear either. Only we wished to be away, away from the City and from the air that touches upon the air of the City. So we walked in, our box in our arms, our heart empty.

We are doomed. Whatever days are left to us, we shall spend them alone. And we have heard of the corruption to be found in solitude. We have torn ourselves from the truth which is our brother men, and there is no road back for us, and no redemption.

We know these things, but we do not care. We care for nothing on earth. We are tired.

Only the glass box in our arms is like a living heart that gives us strength. We have lied to ourselves. We have not built this box for the good of our brothers. We built it for its own sake. It is above all our brothers to us, and its truth above their truth. Why wonder about this? We have not many days to live. We are walking to the fangs awaiting us somewhere among the great, silent trees. There is not a thing behind us to regret.

Then a blow of pain struck us, our first and our only. We thought of the Golden One. We thought of the Golden One whom we shall never see again. Then the pain passed. It is best. We are one of the Damned. It is best if the Golden One forget our name and the body which bore that name.

Chapter Eight

IT HAS been a day of wonder, this, our first day in the forest.

We awoke when a ray of sunlight fell across our face. We wanted to leap to our feet, as we have had to leap every morning of our life, but we remembered suddenly that no bell had rung and there was no bell to ring anywhere. We lay on our back, we threw our arms out, and we looked up at the sky. The leaves had edges of silver that trembled and rippled like a river of green and fire flowing high above us.

We did not wish to move. We thought suddenly that we could lie thus as long as we wished, and we laughed aloud at the thought. We could also rise, or run, or leap, or fall down again. We were thinking that these were thoughts without sense, but before we knew it our body had risen in one leap. Our arms stretched out of their own will, and our body whirled and whirled, till it raised a wind to rustle through the leaves of the bushes. Then our hands seized a branch and swung us high into a tree, with no aim save the wonder of learning the strength of our body. The branch snapped under us and we fell upon the moss that was soft as a cushion. Then our body, losing all sense, rolled over and over on the moss, dry leaves in our tunic, in our hair, in our face. And we heard suddenly that we were laughing, laughing aloud, laughing as if there were no power left in us save laughter.

Then we took our glass box, and we went on into the forest. We went on, cutting through the branches, and it was as if we were swimming through a sea of leaves, with the bushes as waves rising and falling and rising around us, and flinging their green sprays high to the tree tops. The trees parted before us, calling us forward. The forest seemed to welcome us. We went on, without thought, without care, with nothing to feel save the song of our body.

We stopped when we felt hunger. We saw birds in the tree branches, and flying from under our footsteps. We picked up a stone and we sent it as an arrow at a bird. It fell before us. We made a fire, we cooked the bird, and we ate it, and no meal had ever tasted better to us. And we thought suddenly that there was a great satisfaction to be found in the food which we need and obtain by our own hand. And we wished to be hungry again and soon, that we might know again this strange new pride in eating.

Then we walked on. And we came to a stream which lay as a streak of glass among the trees. It lay so still that we saw no water but only a cut in the earth, in which the trees grew down, upturned, and the sky lay at the bottom. We knelt by the stream and we bent down to drink. And then we stopped. For, upon the blue of the sky below us, we saw our own face for the first time.

We sat still and we held our breath. For our face and our body were beautiful. Our face was not like the faces of our brothers, for

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we felt no pity when looking upon it. Our body was not like the bodies of our brothers, for our limbs were straight and thin and hard and strong. And we thought that we could trust this being who looked upon us from the stream, and that we had nothing to fear from this being.

We walked on till the sun had set. When the shadows gathered among the trees, we stopped in a hollow between the roots, where we shall sleep tonight. And suddenly, for the first time this day, we remembered that we are the Damned. We remembered it, and we laughed.

We are writing this on the paper we had hidden in our tunic together with the written pages we had brought for the World Council of Scholars, but never given to them. We have much to speak of to ourselves, and we hope we shall find the words for it in the days to come. Now, we cannot speak, for we cannot understand.

Chapter Nine

WE HAVE not written for many days. We did not wish to speak. For we needed no words to remember that which has happened to us.

It was on our second day in the forest that we heard steps behind us. We hid in the bushes, and we waited. The steps came closer. Then we saw the fold of a white tunic among the trees, and a gleam of gold.

We leapt forward, we ran to them, and we stood looking upon the Golden One.

They saw us, and their hands closed into fists, and the fists pulled their arms down, as if they wished their arms to hold them, while their body swayed. And they could not speak.

We dared not come too close to them. We asked, and our voice trembled:

"How come you to be here, Golden One?"

But they whispered only:

"We have found you. . ."

"How come you to be in the forest?" we asked.

They raised their head, and there was a great pride in their voice; they answered:

"We have followed you."

Then we could not speak, and they said:

"We heard that you had gone to the Uncharted Forest, for the whole City is speaking of it. So on the night of the day when we heard it, we ran away from the Home of the Peasants. We found the marks of your feet across the plains where no men walk. So we followed them, and we went into the forest, and we followed the path where the branches were broken by your body."

Their white tunic was torn, and the branches had cut the skin of their arms, but they spoke as if they had never taken notice of it, nor of weariness, nor of fear.

"We have followed you," they said, "and we shall follow you wherever you go. If danger threatens you, we shall face it also. If it be death, we shall die with you. You are damned, and we wish to share your damnation."

They looked upon us, and their voice was low, but there was bitterness and triumph in their voice:

"Your eyes are as a flame, but our brothers have neither hope nor fire. Your mouth is cut of granite, but our brothers are soft and humble. Your head is high, but our brothers cringe. You walk, but our brothers crawl. We wish to be damned with you, rather than blessed with all our brothers. Do as you please with us, but do not send us away from you."

Then they knelt, and bowed their golden head before us.

We had never thought of that which we did. We bent to raise the Golden One to their feet, but when we touched them, it was as if madness had stricken us. We seized their body and we pressed our lips to theirs. The Golden One breathed once, and their breath was as a moan, and then their arms closed around us.

We stood together for a long time. And we were frightened that we had lived for twenty-one years and had never known the joy that is possible to men.

Then we said:

"Our dearest one. Fear nothing of the forest. There is no danger in solitude. We have no need of our brothers. Let us forget their good and our evil, let us forget all things save that we are together and that there is joy as a bond between us. Give us your hand. Look ahead. It is our own world, Golden One, a strange, unknown world, but our own."

Then we walked on into the forest, their hand in ours.

And that night we knew that to hold the body of women in our arms is neither ugly nor shameful, but the one ecstasy granted to the race of men.

We have walked for many days. The forest has no end, and we seek no end. But each day added to the chain of days between us and the City is like an added blessing.

We have made a bow and many arrows. We can kill more birds than we need for our food; we find water and fruit in the forest. At night, we choose a clearing, and we build a ring of fires around it. We sleep in the midst of that ring, and the beasts dare not attack us. We can see their eyes, green and yellow as coals, watching us from the tree branches beyond. The fires smolder as a crown of jewels around us, and smoke stands still in the air, in col-

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umns made blue by the moonlight. We sleep together in the midst of the ring, the arms of the Golden One around us, their head upon our breast.

Some day we shall stop and build a house, when we shall have gone far enough. But we do not have to hasten. The days before us are without end, like the forest.

We cannot understand this new life which we have found, yet it seems so clear and so simple. When questions come to puzzle us, we walk faster, then turn and forget all things as we watch the Golden One following. The shadows of leaves fall upon their arms, as they spread the branches apart, but their shoulders are in the sun. The skin of their arms is like a blue mist, but their shoulders are white and glowing, as if the light fell not from above, but rose from under their skin. We watch the leaf which has fallen upon their shoulder, and it lies at the curve of their neck, and a drop of dew glistens upon it like a jewel. They approach us, and they stop, laughing, knowing what we think, and they wait obediently, without questions, till it pleases us to turn and go on.

We go on and we bless the earth under our feet. But questions come to us again, as we walk in silence. If that which we have found is the corruption of solitude, then what can men wish for save corruption? If this is the great evil of being alone, then what is good and what is evil?

Everything which comes from the many is good. Everything which comes from the one is evil. Thus we have been taught with our first breath. We have broken the law, but we have never doubted it. Yet now, as we walk through the forest, we are learning to doubt.

There is no life for men, save in useful toil for the good of all their brothers. But we lived not, when we toiled for our brothers; we were only weary. There is no joy for men, save the joy shared with all their brothers. But the only things which taught us joy were the power we created with our wires, and the Golden One. And both these joys belong to us alone, they come from us alone, they bear no relation to our brothers, and they do not concern our brothers in any way. Thus do we wonder.

There is some error, one frightful error, in the thinking of men. What is that error? We do not know, but the knowledge struggles within us, struggles to be born.

Today, the Golden One stopped suddenly and said: "We love you."

But then they frowned and shook their head and looked at us helplessly.

"No," they whispered, "that is not what we wished to say."

They were silent, then they spoke slowly, and their words were halting, like the words of a young child learning to speak for the first time:

"We are one . . . alone . . . and only . . . and we love you who are one . . . alone . . . and only."

We looked into each other's eyes and we knew that the breath of a miracle had touched us, and fled, and left us groping vainly.

And we felt torn, torn for some word we could not find.

Chapter Ten

WE ARE sitting at a table and we are writing this upon paper made thousands of years ago. The light is dim, and we cannot see the Golden One, only one lock of gold on the pillow of the ancient bed. This is our home.

We came upon it today, at sunrise. For many days we had been crossing a chain of mountains. The forest rose among cliffs, and whenever we walked out upon a barren stretch of rock we saw great peaks before us in the west, and to the north of us, and to the south, as far as our eyes could see. The peaks were red and brown, with the green streaks of forests as veins upon them, with blue mists as veils over their heads. We have never heard of these mountains, nor seen them marked on any map. The Uncharted Forest has protected them from the Cities and from the men of the Cities.

We climbed paths where the wild goat dared not follow. Stones rolled from under our feet, and we heard them striking the rocks below, farther and farther down, and the mountains rang with each stroke, and long after the strokes had died. But we went on, for we knew that no men would ever follow our track nor reach us here.

Then today, at sunrise, we saw a white flame among the trees, high on a sheer peak before us. We thought that it was a fire and we stopped. But the flame was unmoving, yet blinding as liquid metal. So we climbed toward it through the rocks. And there, before us, on a broad summit, with the mountains rising behind it, stood a house such as we have never seen, and the white fire came from the sun on the glass of its windows.

The house had two stories and a strange roof flat as a floor. There was more window than wall upon its walls, and the windows went on straight around the corners, though how this kept the house standing we could not guess. The walls were hard and smooth, of that stone unlike stone which we had seen in our tunnel.

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We both knew it without words: this house was left from the Unmentionable Times. The trees had protected it from time and weather, and from men who have less pity than time and weather. We turned to the Golden One and we asked:

"Are you afraid?"

But they shook their head. So we walked to the door, and we threw it open, and we stepped together into the house of the Unmentionable Times.

We shall need the days and the years ahead, to look, to learn and to understand the things of this house. Today, we could only look and try to believe the sight of our eyes. We pulled the heavy curtains from the windows and we saw that the rooms were small, and we thought that not more than twelve men could have lived here. We thought it was strange that men had been permitted to build a house for only twelve.

Never had we seen rooms so full of light. The sunrays danced upon colors, colors, more colors than we thought possible, we who had seen no houses save the white ones, the brown ones and the grey. There were great pieces of glass upon the walls, but it was not glass, for when we looked upon it we saw our own bodies and all the things behind us, as on the face of a lake. There were strange things which we had never seen and the use of which we do not know. And there were globes of glass everywhere, in each room, the globes with the metal cobwebs inside, such as we had seen in our tunnel.

We found the sleeping hall and we stood in awe on its threshold. For it was a small room and there were only two beds in it. We found no other beds in the house, and then we knew that only two had lived here, and this passes understanding.

What kind of world did they have, the men of the Unmentionable Times?

We found garments, and the Golden One gasped at the sight of them. For they were not white tunics, nor white togas; they were of all colors, no two of them alike. Some crumbled to dust as we touched them. But others were of heavier cloth, and they felt soft and new in our fingers.

We found a room with walls made of shelves, which held rows of manuscripts, from the floor to the ceiling. Never had we seen such a number of them, nor of such strange shape. They were not soft and rolled; they had shells of cloth and leather; and the letters on their pages were so small and so even that we wondered at the men who had such handwriting. We glanced through the pages, and we saw that they were written in our language, but we found many words which we could not understand. Tomorrow, we shall begin to read these scripts.

When we had seen all the rooms of the house, we looked upon the Golden One and we both knew the thought in our mind.

"We shall never leave this house," we said, "nor let it be taken from us. This is our home and the end of our journey. This is your house, Golden One, and ours, and it belongs to no other men whatever as far as the earth may stretch. We shall not share it with others, as we share not our joy with them, nor our love, nor our hunger. So be it to the end of our days."

"Your will be done," they said.

Then we went out to gather wood for the great hearth of our home. We brought water from the stream which runs along among the trees under our windows. We killed a mountain goat, and we brought its flesh to be cooked in a strange copper pot we found in a place of wonders, which must have been the cooking room of the house.

We did this work alone, for no words of ours could take the Golden One away from the big glass which is not glass. They stood before it and they looked and looked upon their own body.

When the sun sank beyond the mountains, the Golden One fell asleep on the floor, amidst jewels, and bottles of crystal, and flowers of silk.

We lifted the Golden One in our arms and we carried them to a bed, their head falling softly upon our shoulder. Then we lit a candle, and we brought paper from the room of the manuscripts, and we sat by the window, for we knew that we could not sleep tonight.

And now we look upon the earth and sky. This spread of naked rock and peaks and moonlight is like a world ready to be born, a world that waits. It seems to us it asks a sign from us, a spark, a first commandment. We cannot know what word we are to give, nor what great deed this earth expects to witness. We know it waits. It seems to say it has great gifts to lay before us, but it wishes a greater gift from us. We are to speak. We are to give its goal, its highest meaning to all this glowing space of rock and sky.

We look ahead, we beg our heart for guidance in answering this call no voice has spoken, yet we have heard. We look upon our hands. We see the dust of centuries, the dust which hid great secrets and perhaps great evils. And yet it stirs no fear within our heart, but only silent reverence and pity.

May knowledge come to us! What is the secret our heart has understood and yet will not reveal to us, although it seems to beat as if it were endeavoring to tell it?

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Chapter Eleven

I AM. I think. I will.

My hands . . . My spirit . . . My sky . . . My forest . . . This earth of mine . . .

What must I say besides? These are the words. This is the answer.

I stand on the summit of the mountain. I lift my head and I spread my arms. This, my body and spirit, this is the end of the quest. I wished to know the meaning of things. I am the meaning. I wished to find a warrant for being. I need no warrant for being, and no word of sanction upon my being. I am the warrant and the sanction.

It is my eyes which see, and the sight of my eyes grants beauty to the earth. It is my ears which hear, and the hearing of my ears gives its song to the world. It is my mind which thinks, and the judgment of my mind is the only searchlight that can find the truth. It is my will which chooses. and the choice of my will is the only edict I must respect.

Many words have been granted me, and some are wise. and some are false. but only three are holy: "I will it!"

Whatever road I take, the guiding star is within me; the guiding star and the loadstone which point the way. They point in but one direction. They point to me.

I know not if this earth on which I stand is the core of the universe or if it is but a speck of dust lost in eternity. I know not and I care not. For I know what happiness is possible to me on earth. And my happiness needs no higher aim to vindicate it. My happiness is not the means to an end. It is the end. It is its own goal. It is its own purpose.

Neither am I the means to any end others may wish to accomplish. I am not a tool for their use. I am not a servant of their needs. I am not a bandage for their wounds. I am not a sacrifice on their altars.

I am a man. This miracle of life is mine to own and keep, and mine to guard and mine to use, and mine to kneel before!

I do not surrender my treasures, nor do I share them. The fortune of my spirit is not to be blown into coins of brass and flung to the winds as alms for the poor of the spirit. I guard my treasures: my thought, my will, my freedom. And the greatest of these is freedom.

I owe nothing to my brothers, nor do I gather debts from them. I ask none to live for me, nor do I live for any others. I covet no man's soul, nor is my soul theirs to covet.

I am neither foe nor friend to my brothers, but such as each of them shall deserve of me. And to earn my love, my brothers must do more than to have been born. I do not grant my love without reason, nor to any chance passer-by who may wish to claim it. I honor men with my love. But honor is a thing to be learned.

I shall choose friends among men, but neither slaves nor masters. And I shall choose only such as please me, and them I shall love and respect, but neither command nor obey. And we shall join our hands when we wish, or walk alone when we so desire. For in the temple of his spirit, each man is alone. Let each man keep his temple untouched and undefiled. Then let him join hands with others if he wishes, but only beyond his only threshold.

For the word "We" must be spoken at no time, save by one's choice and as a second thought. This word must never be placed first within man's soul, else it becomes a monster, the root of all the evils on earth, the root of man's torture by men, and of an unspeakable lie.

The word "We" is as lime poured over men, which sets and hardens to stone, and crushes all beneath it, and that which is white and that which is black are lost equally in the grey of it. It is the word by which the depraved steal the virtue of the good, by which the weak steal the might of the strong, by which the fools steal the wisdom of the sages.

What is my joy if all hands, even the unclean, can reach into it? What is my wisdom, if even the fools can dictate to me? What is my freedom, if all creatures, even the botched and the impotent, are my masters? What is my life, if I am but to bow, to agree and to obey?

But I am done with this creed of corruption. I am done with the monster of "We," the word of serfdom, of plunder, of misery, falsehood and shame.

And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, this god whom men have sought since men came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride.

This god, this one word:

"I."

Chapter Twelve

IT WAS when I read the first of the books I found in my house that I saw the word "I." And when I understood this word, the book fell from my hands, and I wept, I who had never known tears. I wept in wonderment and in pity for all mankind.

I understood the blessed thing which I had called my curse. I understood why the best in me had been my sins and my transgressions; and why I had never felt guilt in my sins. I understood that centuries of chains and lashes

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will not kill the spirit of man nor the sense of truth within him.

I read many books for many days. Then I called the Golden One, and I told her what I had read and what I had learned. She looked at me and the first words she spoke were:

"I love you."

Then I said:

"My dearest one, it is not proper for men to be without names. There was a time when each man had a name of his own to distinguish him from all other men. So let us choose our names. I have read of a man who lived many thousands of years ago, and of all the names in these books, his is the one I wish to bear. He took the light of the gods and he brought it to men, and he taught men to be gods. And he suffered for his deed as all bearers of light must suffer. His name was Prometheus."

"It shall be your name," said the Golden One.

"And I have read of a goddess," I said, "who was the mother of the earth and of all the gods. Her name was Gaea. Let this be your name, my Golden One, for you are to be the mother of a new kind of gods."

"It shall be my name," said the Golden One.

Now I look ahead. My future is clear before me. The Saint of the pyre had seen the future when he chose me as his heir, as the heir of all the saints and all the martyrs who came before him and who died for the same cause, for the same word, no matter what name they gave to their cause and their truth.

I shall live here, in my own house. I shall take my food from the earth by the toil of my own hands. I shall learn many secrets from my books. Through the years ahead, I shall rebuild the achievements of the past, and open the way to carry them further, the achievements which are open to me, but closed forever to my brothers, for their minds are shackled to the weakest and dullest ones among them.

I have learned that my power of the sky was known to men long ago; they called it Electricity. It was the power that moved their greatest inventions. It lit this house with light which came from those globes of glass on the walls. I have found the engine which produced this light. I shall learn how to repair it and how to make it work again. I shall learn how to use the wires which carry this power. Then I shall build a barrier of wires around my home, and across the paths which lead to my home; a barrier light as a cobweb, more impassable than a wall of granite; a barrier my brothers will never be able to cross. For they have nothing to fight me with, save the brute force of their numbers. I have my mind.

Then here, on this mountain top, with the world below me and nothing above me but the sun, I shall live my own truth. Gaea is pregnant with my child. Our son will be raised as a man. He will be taught to say "I" and to bear the pride of it. He will be taught to walk straight and on his own feet. He will be taught reverence for his own spirit.

When I shall have read my books and learned my new way, when my home will be ready and my earth tilled, I shall steal one day, for the last time, into the cursed City of my birth. I shall call to me my friend who has no name save International 4-8818, and all those like him, Fraternity 2-5503, who cries without reason, and Solidarity 9-6347 who calls for help in the night, and a few others. I shall call to me all the men and the women whose spirit has not been killed within them and who suffer under the yoke of their brothers. They will follow me and I shall lead them to my fortress. And here, in this uncharted wilderness, I and they, my chosen friends, my fellow-builders, shall write the first chapter in the new history of man.

These are the things before me. And as I stand here at the door of glory, I look behind me for the last time. I look upon the history of men, which I have learned from the books, and I wonder. It was a long story, and the spirit which moved it was the spirit of man's freedom. But what is freedom? Freedom from what? There is nothing to take a man's freedom away from him, save other men. To be free, a man must be free of his brothers. That is freedom. That and nothing else.

At first, man was enslaved by the gods. But he broke their chains. Then he was enslaved by the kings. But he broke their chains. He was enslaved by his birth, by his kind, by his race; but he broke their chains. He declared to all his brothers that a man has rights which neither god nor king nor other men can take away from him, no matter what their number, for his is the right of man, and there is no right on earth above this right. And he stood on the threshold of the freedom for which the blood of the centuries behind him had been spilled.

But then he gave up all he had won, and fell lower than his savage beginning.

What brought it to pass? What disaster took their reason away from men? What whip lashed them to their knees in shame and submission? The worship of the word "We."

WHEN men accepted that worship, the structure of centuries collapsed about them, the structure whose every beam had come from the thought of some one man, each is his day down the ages, from the depth of some one spirit, such spirit as existed but for

(Continued on page 113)

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DIRGE

(Aztec)

By Louis M. Hobbs

The flame that burned in Ichocan is dead.
Burns the world, in fresh fire!
The prophecy is spoken, upon carven stone,
Beneath the sacrificial crimson.
I go from the deserted Temples
To pray atop Popocatopetl for an hour,
And thence, to bury my gods.
O! Mexico hangeth wretched from a tree!
No more the rolling drum of sacrifice,
No more, beneath the silver of the moon,
Shall the shades of Tepaneo
Sing curses to Nezahualcoyotl
Or drink the Star's Blood
Unto the first Acatl.
No more . . . no more . . . For lo! The God cometh!
Hail from afar, Quetzalcoatl! Come in the thunder of the storm
Which blows the wind of conquest o'er the world!
Shake down the Temples of my fathers!
Throw down the House of Tezcatlopochtli!
Strike fear unto Tlaloc, and all her brood across heaven
Where e'er a drop of water falleth
To quench the breathing jungle's thirst!
Welcome, All Father! Welcome unto fire,
Unto the crimson knife that slayeth to the Sun,
The flaming altar of Xipe Totec; I offer thee
The down drooped lips of Anahuac,
The kiss that breeds the seething lust of war . . .
Ayaq! Welcome, O Sons of Xieutecutli! Welcome
Unto the end of everything—of Man, of Peace, of God,
Of Empire—of art, of sacrifice, of bloody ways . . .
Of Mexico.
The flame that burned in Ichocan is dead.
The flame that burned in Ichocan is dead.
O, ye beloved gods!
The flame that burned in Ichocan is dead.

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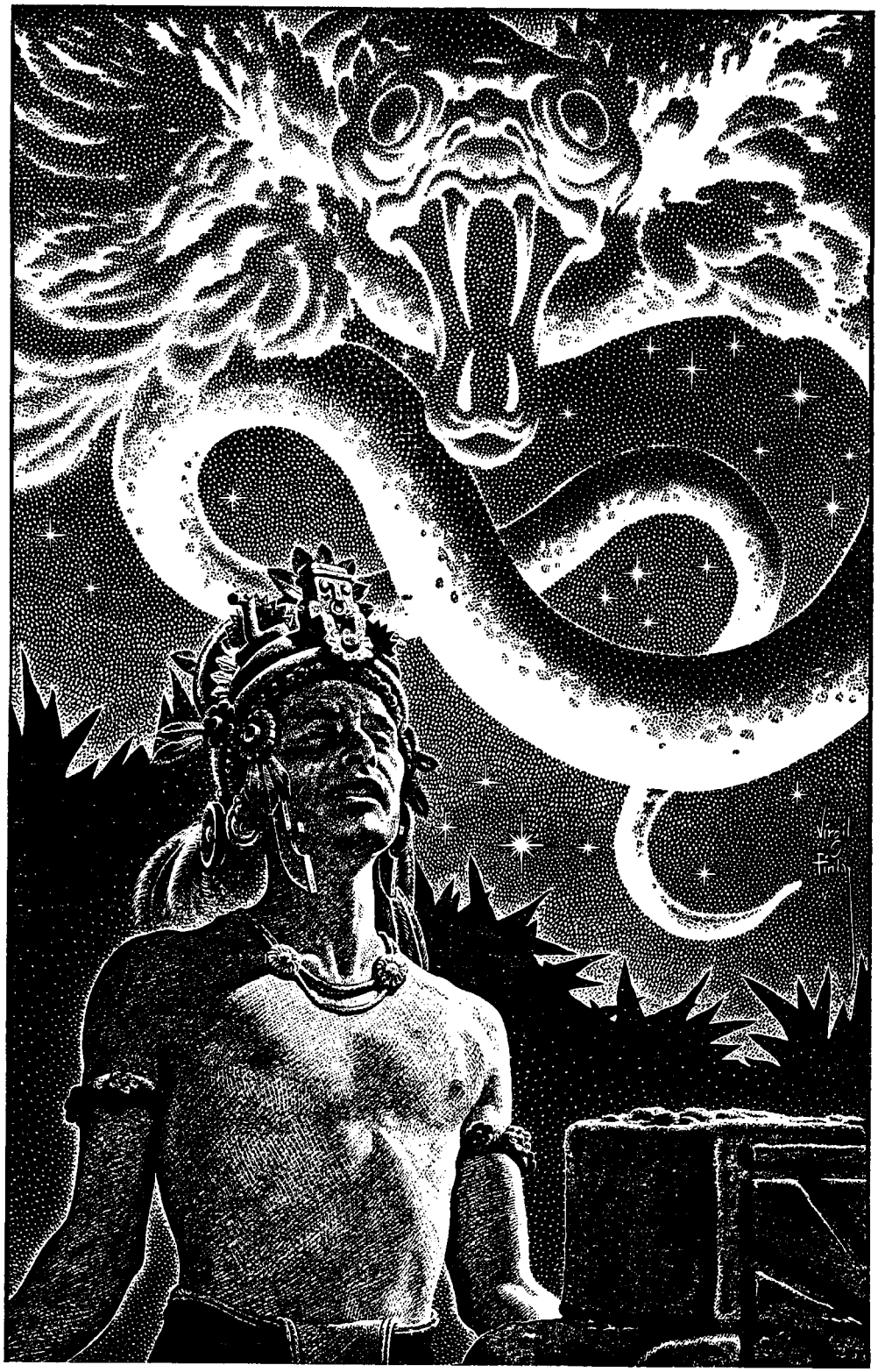

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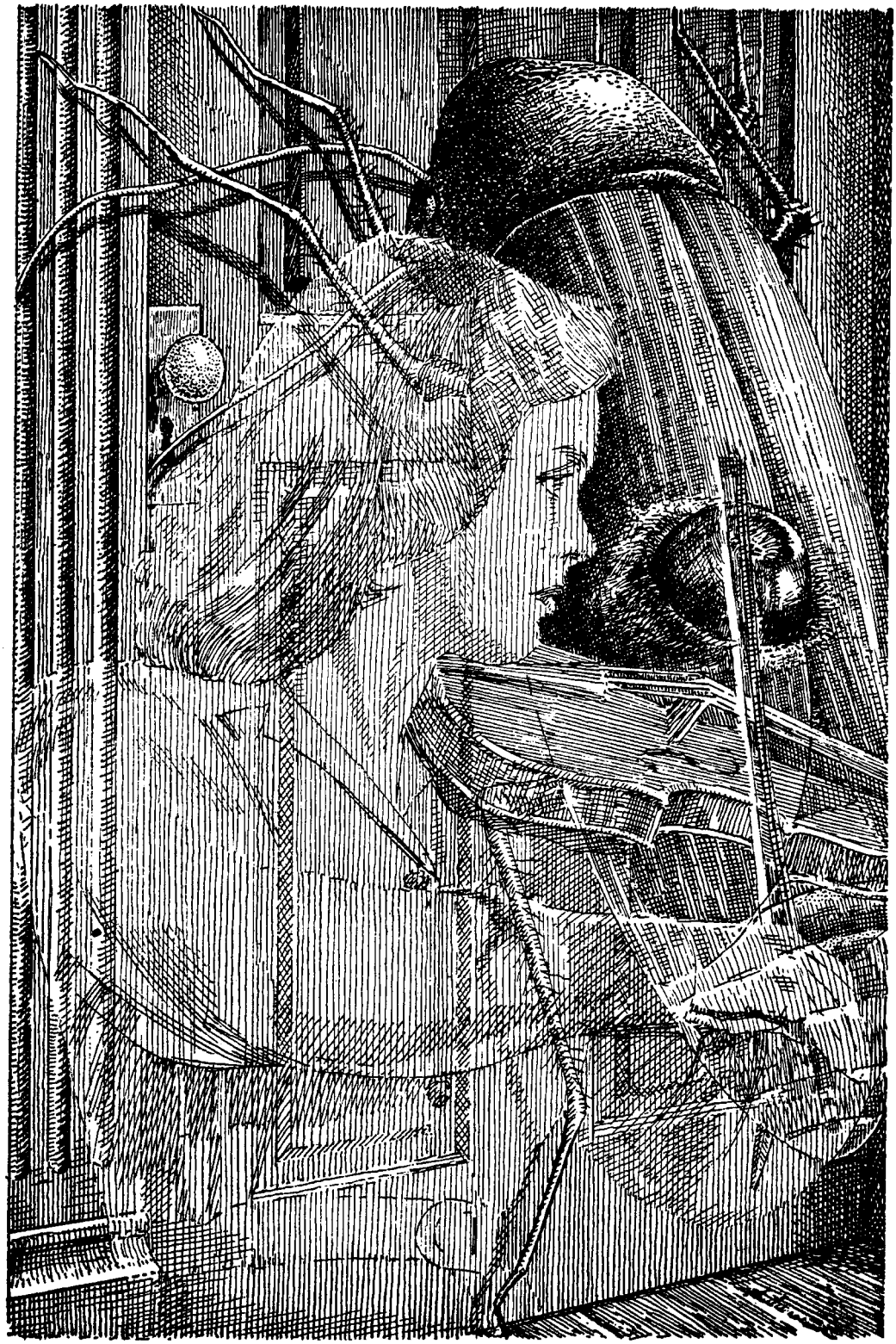

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THE METAMORPHOSIS

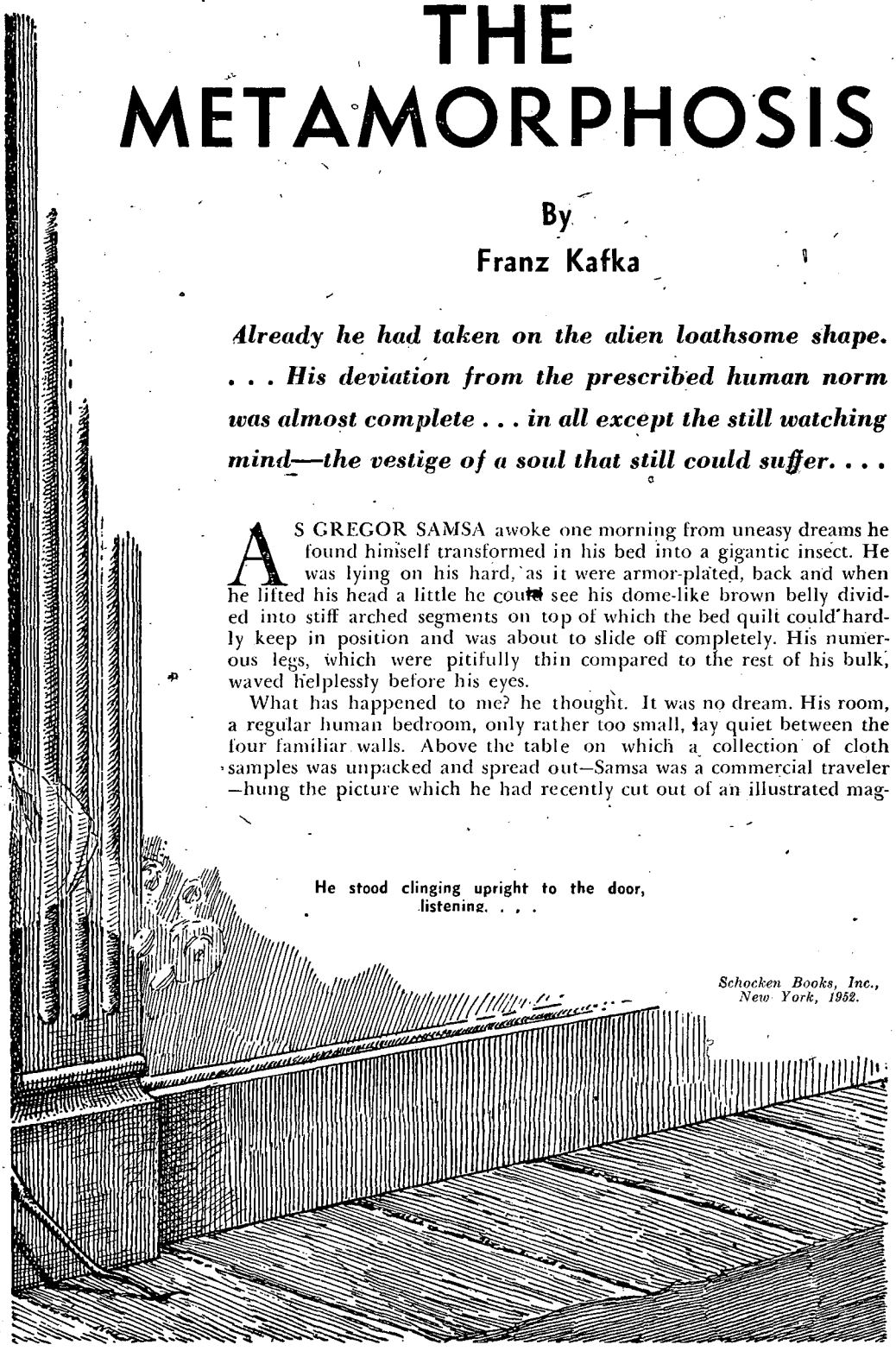
By

Franz Kafka

Already he had taken on the alien loathsome shape. . . . His deviation from the prescribed human norm was almost complete . . . in all except the still watching mind—the vestige of a soul that still could suffer. . . .

AS GREGOR SAMSA awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes.

What has happened to me? he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, only rather too small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. Above the table on which a collection of cloth samples was unpacked and spread out—Samsa was a commercial traveler—hung the picture which he had recently cut out of an illustrated mag-



He stood clinging upright to the door, listening. . . .

Schocken Books, Inc., New York, 1952.

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azine and put into a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the spectator a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm had vanished!

Gregor's eyes turned next to the window, and the overcast sky—one could hear rain drops beating on the window gutter—made him quite melancholy. What about sleeping a little longer and forgetting all this nonsense, he thought, but it could not be done, for he was accustomed to sleep on his right side and in his present condition he could not turn himself over. However violently he forced himself towards his right side he always rolled on his back again. He tried it at least a hundred times, shutting his eyes to keep from seeing his struggling legs, and only desisted when he began to feel in his side a faint dull ache he had never experienced before.

Oh God, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked on! Traveling about day in, day out. It's much more irritating work than doing the actual business in the office, and on top of that there's the trouble of constant traveling, of worrying about train connections, the bed and irregular meals, casual acquaintances that are always new and never become intimate friends. The devil take it all! He felt a slight itching up on his belly; slowly pushed himself on his back nearer to the top of the bed so that he could lift his head more easily; identified the itching place which was surrounded by many small white spots the nature of which he could not understand and made to touch it with a leg, but drew the leg back immediately, for the contact made a cold shiver run through him.

He slid down again into his former position. This getting up early, he thought, makes one quite stupid. A man needs his sleep. Other commercials live like harem women. For instance, when I come back to the hotel of a morning to write up the orders I've got, these others are only sitting down to breakfast. Let me just try that with my chief; I'd be sacked on the spot. Anyhow, that might be quite a good thing for me, who can tell? If I didn't have to hold my hand because of my parents I'd have given notice long ago, I'd have gone to the chief and told him exactly what I think of him. That would knock him endways from his desk! It's a queer way of doing, too, this sitting on high at a desk and talking down to employees, especially when they have to come quite near because the chief is hard of hearing. Well, there's still hope; once I've saved enough money to pay back my parents' debts to him—that should take another five or six years—I'll do it without fail. I'll cut myself completely loose then. For the moment, though, I'd better get up, since my train goes at five o'clock.

He looked at the alarm clock ticking on the chest. Heavenly Father! he thought. It was half-past six o'clock and the hands were quietly moving on; it was even past the half-hour, it was getting on toward a quarter to seven. Had the alarm clock not gone off? From the bed one could see that it had been properly set for four o'clock; of course it must have gone off. Yes, but was it possible to sleep quietly through that ear-splitting noise? Well, he had not slept quietly, yet apparently all the more soundly for that. But what was he to do now? The next train went at seven o'clock; to catch that he would need to hurry like mad and his samples weren't even packed up, and he himself wasn't feeling particularly fresh and active. And even if he did catch the train he wouldn't avoid a row with the chief, since the firm's porter would have been waiting for the five o'clock train and would have long since reported his failure to turn up. The porter was a creature of the chief's, spineless and stupid. Well, supposing he were to say he was sick? But that would be most unpleasant and would look suspicious, since during his five years' employment he had not been ill once. The chief himself would be sure to come with the sick-insurance doctor, would reproach his parents with their son's laziness and would cut all excuses short by referring to the insurance doctor, who of course regarded all mankind as perfectly healthy malingerers. And would he be so far wrong on this occasion? Gregor really felt quite well, apart from a drowsiness that was utterly superfluous after such a long sleep, and he was even unusually hungry.

AS ALL this was running through his mind at top speed without his being able to decide to leave his bed—the alarm clock had just struck a quarter to seven—there came a cautious tap at the door behind the head of his bed. "Gregor," said a voice—it was his mother's—"it's a quarter to seven. Hadn't you a train to catch?" That gentle voice! Gregor had a shock as he heard his own voice answering hers, unmistakably his own voice, it was true, but with a persistent horrible twittering squeak behind it like an undertone, that left the words in their clear shape only for the first moment and then rose up reverberating round them to destroy their sense, so that one could not be sure one had heard them rightly. Gregor wanted to answer at length and explain everything, but in the circumstances he confined himself to saying: "Yes, yes, thank you, Mother; I'm getting up now." The wooden door between them must have kept the change in his voice from being noticeable outside, for

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his mother contented herself with this statement and shuffled away. Yet this brief exchange of words had made the other members of the family aware that Gregor was still in the house, so that, now, at one of the side doors his father was already knocking, gently, yet with his fist. "Gregor, Gregor," he called, "what's the matter with you?" And after a little while he called again in a deeper voice: "Gregor! Gregor!" At the other side door his sister was saying in a low, plaintive tone: "Gregor? Aren't you well? Are you needing anything?" He answered them both at once: "I'm just ready," and did his best to make his voice sound as normal as possible by enunciating the words very clearly and leaving long pauses between them. So his father went back to his breakfast, but his sister whispered: "Gregor, open the door, do." However, he was not thinking of opening the door, and felt thankful for the prudent habit he had acquired in traveling of locking all doors during the night, even at home.

His immediate intention was to get up quietly without being disturbed, to put on his clothes and above all eat his breakfast, and only then to consider what else was to be done, since in bed, he was well aware, his meditations would come to no sensible conclusion. He remembered that often enough in bed he had felt small aches and pains, probably caused by awkward postures, which had proved purely imaginary once he got up, and he looked forward eagerly to seeing this morning's delusions gradually fall away. That the change in his voice was nothing but the precursor of a severe chill, a standing ailment of commercial travelers, he had not the least possible doubt.

To get rid of the quilt was quite easy; he had only to inflate himself a little and it fell off by itself. But the next move was difficult, especially because he was so uncommonly broad. He would have needed arms and hands to hoist himself up; instead he had only the numerous little legs which never stopped waving in all directions and which he could not control in the least. When he tried to bend one of them it was the first to stretch itself straight; and did he succeed at last in making it do what he wanted, all the other legs meanwhile waved the more wildly in a high degree of unpleasant agitation.

"But what's the use of lying idle in bed," said Gregor to himself.

He thought that he might get out of bed with the lower part of his body first, but this lower part, which he had not yet seen and of which he could form no clear conception, proved too difficult to move; it shifted so slowly; and when finally, almost wild with annoyance, he gathered his forces together and thrust out recklessly, he had miscalculated the direction and bumped heavily against the lower end of the bed, and the stinging pain he felt informed him that precisely this lower part of his body was at the moment probably the most sensitive.

So he tried to get the top part of himself out first, and cautiously moved his head towards the edge of the bed. That proved easy enough, and despite its breadth and mass the bulk of his body at last slowly followed the movement of his head. Still, when he finally got his head free over the edge of the bed he felt too scared to go on advancing, for after all if he let himself fall in this way it would take a miracle to keep his head from being injured. And at all costs he must not lose consciousness now. Better to stay in bed.

But when after a repetition of the same efforts he lay in his former position again, sighing, and watched his little legs struggling against each other more widely than ever, if that were possible, and saw no way of bringing any order into this arbitrary confusion, he told himself again that it was impossible to stay in bed and that the most sensible course was to risk everything for the smallest hope of getting away from it. At the same time he did not forget meanwhile to remind himself that cool reflection, the coolest possible, was much better than desperate resolves. In such moments he focused his eyes as sharply as possible on the

It has been told upon good authority that this story was written after Franz Kafka, at the time a young man, had been denounced by his father as less than human because he had not lived up to what his family considered his responsibilities. Being a genius, the young man made out of what, to another, might have been the cause of complete frustration, the little gem of literature which we present here, and which is one of the foundation stones of his fame.

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window, but, unfortunately, the prospect of the morning fog, which muffled even the other side of the narrow street, brought him little encouragement and comfort. "Seven o'clock already," he said to himself when the alarm clock chimed again, "seven o'clock already and still such a thick fog." And for a little while he lay quiet, breathing lightly, as if perhaps expecting such complete repose to restore all things to their real and normal condition.

But then he said to himself: "Before it strikes a quarter past seven I must be quite out of this bed, without fail. Anyhow, by that time someone will have come from the office to ask for me, since it opens before seven." And he set himself to rocking his whole body at once in a regular rhythm, with the idea of swinging it out of the bed. If he tipped himself out in that way he could keep his head from injury by lifting it at an acute angle when he fell. His back seemed to be hard and was not likely to suffer from a fall on the carpet. His biggest worry was the loud crash he would not be able to help making, which would probably cause anxiety, if not terror, behind all the doors. Still, he must take the risk.

WHEN he was already half out of the bed —the new method was more a game than an effort, for he needed only to hitch himself across by rocking to and fro—it struck him how simple it would be if he could get help. Two strong people—he thought of his father and the servant girl—would be amply sufficient; they would only have to thrust their arms under his convex back, lever him out of the bed, bend down with their burden and then be patient enough to let him turn himself right over on to the floor, where it was to be hoped his legs would then find their proper function. Well, ignoring the fact that the doors were all locked, ought he really to call for help? In spite of his misery he could not suppress a smile at the very idea of it.

He had got so far that he could barely keep his equilibrium when he rocked himself strongly, and he would have to nerve himself very soon for the final decision since in five minutes' time it would be a quarter past seven —when the front door bell rang. "That's someone from the office," he said to himself, and grew almost rigid, while his little legs only jigged about all the faster. For a moment everything stayed quiet. "They're not going to open the door," said Gregor to himself, catching at some kind of irrational hope. But then of course the servant girl went as usual to the door with her heavy tread and opened it. Gregor needed only to hear the first good morning of the visitor to know immediately who it was—the chief clerk himself. What a fate, to be condemned to work for a firm where the smallest omission at once gave rise to the gravest suspicion! Were all employees in a body nothing but scoundrels, was there not among them one single loyal devoted man who, had he wasted only an hour or so of the firm's time in a morning, was so tormented by conscience as to be driven out of his mind and actually incapable of leaving his bed? Wouldn't it really have been sufficient to send an apprentice to inquire—if any inquiry were necessary at all—did the chief clerk himself have to come and thus indicate to the entire family, an innocent family, that this suspicious circumstance would be investigated by no one less versed in affairs than himself? And more through the agitation caused by these reflections than through any act of will Gregor swung himself out of bed with all his strength. There was a loud thump, but it was not really a crash. His fall was broken to some extent by the carpet, his back, too, was less stiff than he thought, and so there was merely a dull thud, not so very startling. Only he had not lifted his head carefully enough and had hit it; he turned it and rubbed it on the carpet in pain and irritation.

"That was something falling down in there," said the chief clerk in the next room to the left. Gregor tried to suppose to himself that something like what had happened to him today might some day happen to the chief clerk; one really could not deny that it was possible. But as if in brusque reply to this supposition the chief clerk took a couple of firm steps in the next-door room and his patent leather boots creaked. From the right-hand room his sister was whispering to inform him of the situation: "Gregor, the chief clerk's here." "I know," muttered Gregor to himself; but he didn't dare to make his voice loud enough for his sister to hear it.

"Gregor," said his father now from the left-hand room, "the chief clerk has come and wants to know why you didn't catch the early train. We don't know what to say to him. Besides, he wants to talk to you in person. So open the door, please. He will be good enough to excuse the untidiness of your room." "Good morning, Mr. Samsa," the chief clerk was calling amiably meanwhile. "He's not well," said his mother to the visitor, while his father was still speaking through the door, "he's not well, sir, believe me. What else would make him miss a train! The boy thinks about nothing but his work. It makes me almost cross the way he never goes out in the evenings; he's been here the last eight days and has stayed at home every single evening. He just sits there quietly at the table reading a newspaper or looking through railway timetables. The

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only amusement he gets is doing fretwork. For instance, he spent two or three evenings cutting out a little picture frame; you would be surprised to see how pretty it is; it's hanging in his room; you'll see it in a minute when Gregor opens the door. I must say I'm glad you've come, sir; we should never have got him to unlock the door by ourselves; he's so obstinate; and I'm sure he's unwell, though he wouldn't have it to be so this morning." "I'm just coming," said Gregor slowly and carefully, not moving an inch for fear of losing one word of the conversation. "I can't think of any other explanation, madam," said the chief clerk, "I hope it's nothing serious. Although on the other hand I must say that we men of business—fortunately or unfortunately—very often simply have to ignore any slight indisposition; since business must be attended to." "Well, can the chief clerk come in now?" asked Gregor's father impatiently, again knocking on the door. "No," said Gregor. In the left-hand room a painful silence followed this refusal, in the right-hand room his sister began to sob.

WHY didn't his sister join the others? She was probably newly out of bed and hadn't even begun to put on her clothes yet. Well, why was she crying? Because he wouldn't get up and let the chief clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his job, and because the chief would begin dunning his parents again for the old debts? Surely these were things one didn't need to worry about for the present. Gregor was still at home and not in the least thinking of deserting the family. At the moment, true, he was lying on the carpet and no one who knew the condition he was in could seriously expect him to admit the chief clerk. But for such a small discourtesy, which could plausibly be explained away somehow later on, Gregor could hardly be dismissed on the spot. And it seemed to Gregor that it would be much more sensible to leave him in peace for the present than to trouble him with tears and entreaties. Still, of course, their uncertainty bewildered them all and excused their behavior.

"Mr. Samsa," the chief clerk called now in a louder voice, "what's the matter with you? Here you are, barricading yourself in your room, giving only 'yes' and 'no' for answers, causing your parents a lot of unnecessary trouble and neglecting—I mention this only in passing—neglecting your business duties in an incredible fashion. I am speaking here in the name of your parents and of your chief, and I beg you quite seriously to give me an immediate and precise explanation. You amaze me, you amaze me. I thought you were a quiet, dependable person, and now all at once you seem bent on making a disgraceful exhibition of yourself. The chief did hint to me early this morning a possible explanation for your disappearance—with reference to the cash payments that were entrusted to you recently—but I almost pledged my solemn word of honor that this could not be so. But now that I see how incredibly obstinate you are, I no longer have the slightest desire to take your part at all. And your position in the firm is not so unassailable. I came with the intention of telling you all this in private, but since you are wasting my time so needlessly I don't see why your parents shouldn't hear it too. For some time past your work has been most unsatisfactory; this is not the season of the year for a business boom, of course, we admit that, but a season of the year for doing no business at all, that does not exist, Mr. Samsa, must not exist."

"But, sir," cried Gregor, beside himself and in his agitation forgetting everything else, "I'm just going to open the door this very minute. A slight illness, an attack of giddiness, has kept me from getting up. I'm still lying in bed. But I feel all right again. I'm getting out of bed now. Just give me a moment or two longer! I'm not quite so well as I thought. But I'm all right, really. How a thing like that can suddenly strike one down! Only last night I was quite well, my parents can tell you, or rather I did have a slight presentiment. I must have showed some sign of it. Why didn't I report it at the office! But one always thinks that an indisposition can be got over without staying in the house. Oh sir, do spare my parents! All that you're reproaching me with now has no foundation; no one has ever said a word to me about it. Perhaps you haven't looked at the last orders I sent in. Anyhow, I can still catch the eight o'clock train, I'm much the better for my few hours' rest. Don't let me detain you here, sir; I'll be attending to business very soon, and do be good enough to tell the chief so and to make my excuses to him!"

And while all this was tumbling out pell-mell and Gregor hardly knew what he was saying, he had reached the chest quite easily, perhaps because of the practice he had had in bed, and was now trying to lever himself upright by means of it. He meant actually to open the door, actually to show himself and speak to the chief clerk; he was eager to find out what the others, after all their insistence, would say at the sight of him. If they were horrified then the responsibility was no longer his and he could stay quiet. But if they took it calmly, then he had no reason either to be upset, and could really get to the station for the eight o'clock train if he hurried. At first

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he slipped down a few times from the polished surface of the chest, but at length with a last heave he stood upright; he paid no more attention to the pains in the lower part of his body, however they smarted. Then he let himself fall against the back of a near-by chair, and clung with his little legs to the edges of it. That brought him into control of himself again and he stopped speaking, for now he could listen to what the chief clerk was saying.

"Did you understand a word of it?" the chief clerk was asking; "surely he can't be trying to make fools of us?" "Oh dear," cried his mother, in tears, "perhaps he's terribly ill and we're tormenting him. Grete! Grete!" she called out then. "Yes Mother?" called his sister from the other side. They were calling to each other across Gregor's room. "You must go this minute for the doctor. Gregor is ill. Go for the doctor, quick. Did you hear how he was speaking?" "That was no human voice," said the chief clerk in a voice noticeably low beside the shrillness of the mother's. "Anna! Anna!" his father was calling through the hall to the kitchen, clapping his hands, "get a locksmith at once!" And the two girls were already running through the hall with a swish of skirts—how could his sister have got dressed so quickly—and were tearing the front door open. There was no sound of its closing again; they had evidently left it open, as one does in houses where some great misfortune has happened.

But Gregor was now much calmer. The words he uttered were no longer understandable, apparently, although they seemed clear enough to him, even clearer than before, perhaps because his ear had grown accustomed to the sound of them. Yet at any rate people now believed that something was wrong with him, and were ready to help him. The positive certainty with which these first measures had been taken comforted him. He felt himself drawn once more into the human circle and hoped for great and remarkable results from both the doctor and the locksmith, without really distinguishing precisely between them. To make his voice as clear as possible for the decisive conversation that was now imminent he coughed a little, as quietly as he could, of course, since this noise too might not sound like a human cough for all he was able to judge. In the next room meanwhile there was complete silence. Perhaps his parents were sitting at the table with the chief clerk, whispering, perhaps they were all leaning against the door and listening.

SLOWLY Gregor pushed the chair towards the door, then let go of it, caught hold of the door for support—the soles at the end of his little legs were somewhat sticky—and rested against it for a moment after his efforts. Then he set himself to turning the key in the lock with his mouth. It seemed, unhappily, that he hadn't really any teeth—what could he grip the key with?—but on the other hand his jaws were certainly very strong; with their help he did manage to set the key in motion, heedless of the fact that he was undoubtedly damaging them somewhere, since a brown fluid issued from his mouth, flowed over the key and dripped on the floor. "Just listen to that," said the chief clerk next door; "he's turning the key." That was a great encouragement to Gregor; but they should all have shouted encouragement to him, his father and mother too: "Go on, Gregor," they should have called out, "keep going, hold on to that key!" And in the belief that they were all following his efforts intently, he clenched his jaws recklessly on the key with all the force at his command. As the turning of the key progressed he circled round the lock, holding on now only with his mouth, pushing on the key, as required, or pulling it down again with all the weight of his body. The louder click of the finally yielding lock literally quickened Gregor. With a deep breath of relief he said to himself: "So I didn't need the locksmith," and laid his head on the handle to open the door wide.

Since he had to pull the door towards him, he was still invisible when it was really wide open. He had to edge himself slowly round the near half of the double door, and to do it very carefully if he was not to fall plump upon his back just on the threshold. He was still carrying out this difficult maneuver, with no time to observe anything else, when he heard the chief clerk utter a loud "Oh!"—it sounded like a gust of wind—and now he could see the man, standing as he was nearest to the door, clapping one hand before his open mouth and slowly backing away as if driven by some invisible steady pressure. His mother—in spite of the chief clerk's being there her hair was still undone and sticking up in all directions—first clasped her hands and looked at his father, then took two steps towards Gregor and fell on the floor among her outspread skirts, her face quite hidden on her breast. His father knotted his fist with a fierce expression on his face as if he meant to knock Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly round the living room, covered his eyes with his hands and wept till his great chest heaved.

Gregor did not go now into the living room, but leaned against the inside of the firmly shut wing of the door, so that only half his body was visible and his head above it bending sideways to look at the others. The light had

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meanwhile strengthened; on the other side of the street one could see clearly a section of the endlessly long, dark gray building opposite—it was a hospital—abruptly punctuated by its row of regular windows; the rain was still falling, but only in large singly discernible and literally singly splashing drops. The breakfast dishes were set out on the table lavishly, for breakfast was the most important meal of the day to Gregor's father, who lingered it out for hours over various newspapers. Right opposite Gregor on the wall hung a photograph of himself on military service, as a lieutenant, hand on sword, a carefree smile on his face, inviting one to respect his uniform and military bearing. The door leading to the hall was open, and one could see that the front door stood open too, showing the landing beyond and the beginning of the stairs going down.

"Well," said Gregor, knowing perfectly that he was the only one who had retained any composure, "I'll put my clothes on at once, pack up my samples and start off. Will you only let me go? You see, sir, I'm not obstinate, and I'm willing to work; traveling is a hard life, but I couldn't live without it. Where are you going, sir? To the office? Yes? Will you give a true account of all this? One can be temporarily incapacitated, but that's just the moment for remembering former services and bearing in mind that later on, when the incapacity has been got over, one will certainly work with all the more industry and concentration. I'm loyally bound to serve the chief, you know that very well. Besides, I have to provide for my parents and my sister. I'm in great difficulties, but I'll get out of them again. Don't make things any worse for me than they are. Stand up for me in the firm. Travelers are not popular there, I know. People think they earn sacks of money and just have a good time. A prejudice there's no particular reason for revising. But you, sir, have a more comprehensive view of affairs than the rest of the staff, yes, let me tell you in confidence, a more comprehensive view than the chief himself, who, being the owner, lets his judgment easily be swayed against one of his employees. And you know very well that the traveler, who is never seen in the office almost the whole year round, can so easily fall a victim to gossip and ill luck and unfounded complaints, which he mostly knows nothing about, except when he comes back exhausted from his rounds, and only then suffers in person from their evil consequences, which he can no longer trace back to the original causes. Sir, sir, don't go away without a word to me to show that you think me in the right at least to some extent!"

But at Gregor's very first words the chief

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clerk had already backed away and only stared at him with parted lips over one twitching shoulder. And while Gregor was speaking he did not stand still one moment but stole away towards the door, without taking his eyes off Gregor, yet only an inch at a time, as if obeying some secret injunction to leave the room. He was already at the hall, and the suddenness with which he took his last step out of the living room would have made one believe he had burned the sole of his foot. Once in the hall he stretched his right arm before him towards the staircase, as if some supernatural power were waiting there to deliver him.

GREGOR perceived that the chief clerk must on no account be allowed to go away in this frame of mind if his position in the firm were not endangered to the utmost. His parents did not understand this so well; they had convinced themselves in the course of years that Gregor was settled for life in this firm, and besides they were so preoccupied with their immediate troubles that all foresight had forsaken them. Yet Gregor had this foresight. The chief clerk must be detained, soothed, persuaded and finally won over; the whole future of Gregor and his family depended on it! If only his sister had been there! She was intelligent; she had begun to cry while Gregor was still lying quietly on his back. And no doubt the chief clerk, so partial to ladies, would have been guided by her; she would have shut the door of the flat and in the hall talked him out of his horror. But she was not there, and Gregor would have to handle the situation himself. And without remembering that he was still unaware what powers of movement he possessed, without even remembering that his words in all possibility, indeed in all likelihood, would again be unintelligible, he let go the wing of the door, pushed himself through the opening, started to walk towards the chief clerk, who was already ridiculously clinging with both hands to the railing on the landing; but immediately, as he was feeling for a support, he fell down with a little cry upon all his numerous legs. Hardly was he down when he experienced for the first time this morning a sense of physical comfort; his legs had firm ground under them; they were completely obedient, as he noted with joy; they even strove to carry him forward in whatever direction he chose; and he was inclined to believe that a final relief from all his sufferings was at hand. But in the same moment as he found himself on the floor, rocking with suppressed eagerness to move, not far from his mother, indeed just in front of her, she, who had seemed so completely crushed, sprang all at once to her feet, her arms and fingers outspread, cried: "Help, for God's sake, help!" bent her head down as if to see Gregor better, yet on the contrary kept backing senselessly away; had quite forgotten that the laden table stood behind her; sat upon it hastily, as if in absence of mind, when she bumped into it; and seemed altogether unaware that the big coffee pot beside her was upset and pouring coffee in a flood over the carpet.

"Mother, Mother," said Gregor in a low voice, and looked up at her. The chief clerk, for the moment, had quite slipped from his mind; instead, he could not resist snapping his jaws together at the sight of the streaming coffee. That made his mother scream again, she fled from the table and fell into the arms of his father, who hastened to catch her. But Gregor had now no time to spare for his parents; the chief clerk was already on the stairs; with his chin on the banisters he was taking one last backward look. Gregor made a spring, to be as sure as possible of overtaking him; the chief clerk must have divined his intention, for he leaped down several steps and vanished; he was still yelling "Ugh!" and it echoed through the whole staircase.

Unfortunately, the flight of the chief clerk seemed completely to upset Gregor's father, who had remained relatively calm until now, for instead of running after the man himself, or at least not hindering Gregor in his pursuit, he seized in his right hand the walking stick which the chief clerk had left behind on a chair, together with a hat and greatcoat, snatched in his left hand a large newspaper from the table and began stamping his feet and flourishing the stick and the newspaper to drive Gregor back into his room. No entreaty of Gregor's availed, indeed no entreaty was even understood, however humbly he bent his head his father only stamped on the floor the more loudly. Behind his father his mother had torn open a window, despite the cold weather, and was leaning far out of it with her face in her hands. A strong draught set in from the street to the staircase, the window curtains blew in, the newspapers on the table fluttered, stray pages whisked over the floor. Pitilessly Gregor's father drove him back, hissing and crying "Shoo!" like a savage. But Gregor was quite unpracticed in walking backwards, it really was a slow business. If he only had a chance to turn around he could get back to his room at once, but he was afraid of exasperating his father by the slowness of such a rotation and at any moment the stick in his father's hand might hit him a fatal blow on the back or on the head. In the end, however, nothing else was left for him to do since to his horror he observed that in moving back-

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wards he could not even control the direction he took; and so, keeping an anxious eye on his father all the time over his shoulder, he began to turn round as quickly as he could, which was in reality very slowly. Perhaps his father noted his good intentions, for he did not interfere except every now and then to help him in the maneuver from a distance with the point of the stick. If only he would have stopped making that unbearable hissing noise! It made Gregor quite lose his head. He had turned almost completely round when the hissing noise so distracted him that he even turned a little the wrong way again. But when at last his head was fortunately right in front of the doorway, it appeared that his body was too broad simply to get through the opening. His father, of course, in his present mood was far from thinking of such a thing as opening the other half of the door, to let Gregor have enough space. He had merely the fixed idea of driving Gregor back into his room as quickly as possible. He would never have suffered Gregor to make the circumstantial preparations for standing up on end and perhaps slipping his way through the door. Maybe he was now making more noise than ever to urge Gregor forward, as if no obstacle impeded him; to Gregor, anyhow, the noise in his rear sounded no longer like the voice of one single father; this was really no joke, and Gregor thrust himself—come what might—into the doorway. One side of his body rose up, he was tilted at an angle in the doorway, his flank was quite bruised, horrid blotches stained the white door, soon he was stuck fast and, left to himself, could not have moved at all, his legs on one side fluttered trembling in the air, those on the other were crushed painfully to the floor—when from behind his father gave him a strong push which was literally a deliverance and he flew far into the room, bleeding freely. The door was slammed behind him with the stick, and then at last there was silence.

Chapter Two

NOT until it was twilight did Gregor awake out of a deep sleep, more like a swoon than a sleep. He would certainly have waked up of his own accord not much later, for he felt himself sufficiently rested and well-slept, but it seemed to him as if a fleeting step and a cautious shutting of the door leading into the hall had aroused him. The electric lights in the street cast a pale sheen here and there on the ceiling and the upper surfaces of the furniture, but down below, where he lay, it was dark. Slowly, awkwardly trying out his feelers, which he now first learned to appreciate, he pushed his way to the door to see what had been happening there. His left side felt like one single long, unpleasantly tense scar, and he had actually to limp on his two rows of legs. One little leg, moreover, had been severely damaged in the course of that morning's events—it was almost a miracle that only one had been damaged—and trailed uselessly behind him.

He had reached the door before he discovered what had really drawn him to it: the smell of food. For there stood a basin filled with fresh milk in which floated little sops of white bread. He could almost have laughed with joy, since he was now still hungrier than in the morning, and he dipped his head almost over the eyes straight into the milk. But soon in disappointment he withdrew it again; not only did he find it difficult to feed because of his tender left side—and he could only feed with the palpitating collaboration of his whole body—he did not like the milk either, although milk had been his favorite drink and that was certainly why his sister had set it there for him, indeed it was almost with repulsion that he turned away from the basin and crawled back to the middle of the room.

He could see through the crack of the door that the gas was turned on in the living room, but while usually at this time his father made a habit of reading the afternoon newspaper in a loud voice to his mother and occasionally to his sister as well, not a sound was now to be heard. Well, perhaps his father had recently given up this habit of reading aloud, which his sister had mentioned so often in conversation and in her letters. But there was the same silence all around, although the flat was certainly not empty of occupants. "What a quiet life our family has been leading," said Gregor to himself, and as he sat there motionless staring into the darkness he felt great pride in the fact that he had been able to provide such a life for his parents and sister in such a fine flat. But what if all the quiet, the comfort, the contentment were now to end in horror? To keep himself from being lost in such thoughts Gregor took refuge in movement and crawled up and down the room.

Once during the long evening one of the side doors was opened a little and quickly shut again, later the other side door too; someone had apparently wanted to come in and then thought better of it. Gregor now stationed himself immediately before the living room door, determined to persuade any hesitating visitor to come in or at least to discover who it might be; but the door was not opened again and he waited in vain. In the early morning, when the doors were locked, they had all wanted to come in, now that he had opened one door and the other had apparently been

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opened during the day, no one came in and even the keys were on the other side of the doors.

It was late at night before the gas went out in the living room, and Gregor could easily tell that his parents and his sister had all stayed awake until then, for he could clearly hear the three of them stealing away on tiptoe. No one was likely to visit him, not until the morning, that was certan; so he had plenty of time to meditate at his leisure on how he was to arrange his life afresh. But the lofty, empty room in which he had to lie flat on the floor filled him with an apprehension he could not account for, since it had been his very own room for the past five years—and with a half-unconscious action, not without a slight feeling of shame, he scuttled under the sofa, where he felt comfortable at once, although his back was a little cramped and he could not lift his head up, and his only regret was that his body was too broad to get the whole of it under the sofa.

He stayed there all night, spending the time partly in a light slumber, from which his hunger kept waking him up with a start, and partly in worrying and sketching vague hopes, which all led to the same conclusion, that he must lie low for the present and, by exercising patience and the utmost consideration, help the family to bear the inconvenience he was bound to cause them in his present condition.

VERY early in the morning, it was still almost night, Gregor had the chance to test the strength of his new resolutions, for his sister, nearly fully dressed, opened the door from the hall and peered in. She did not see him at once, yet when she caught sight of him under the sofa—well, he had to be somewhere, he couldn't have flown away, could he?—she was so startled that without being able to help it she slammed the door shut again. But as if regretting her behavior she opened the door again immediately and came in on tiptoe, as if she were visiting an invalid or even a stranger. Gregor had pushed his head forward to the very edge of the sofa and watched her. Would she notice that he had left the milk standing, and not for lack of hunger, and would she bring in some other kind of food more to his taste? If she did not do it of her own accord, he would rather starve than draw her attention to the fact, although he felt a wild impulse to dart out from under the sofa, throw himself at her feet and beg her for something to eat. But his sister at once noticed, with surprise, that the basin was still full, except for a little milk that had been spilt all around it, she lifted it immediately, not with her bare hands, true, but with a cloth, and carried it away. Gregor was wildly curious to know what she would bring instead, and made various speculations about it. Yet what she actually did next, in the goodness of her heart, he could never have guessed at. To find out what he liked she brought him a whole selection of food, all set out on an old newspaper. There were old, half-decayed vegetables, bones from last night's supper covered with a white sauce that had thickened; some raisins and almonds; a piece of cheese that Grgeor would have called uneatable two days ago; a dry roll of bread, a buttered roll, and a roll both buttered and salted. Besides all that, she set down again the same basin, into which she had poured some water, and which was apparently to be reserved for his exclusive use. And with fine tact, knowing that Gregor would not eat in her presence, she withdrew quickly and even turned the key, to let him understand that he could take his ease as much as he liked. Gregor's legs all whizzed towards the food. His wounds must have healed completely, moreover, for he felt no disability, which amazed him and made him reflect how more than a month ago he had cut one finger a little with a knife and had still suffered pain from the wound only the day before yesterday. Am I less sensitive now? he thought, and sucked greedily at the cheese, which above all the other edibles attracted him at once and strongly. One after another and with tears of satisfaction in his eyes he quickly devoured the cheese, the vegetables and the sauce; the fresh food, on the other hand, had no charms for him, he could not even stand the smell of it and actually dragged away to some little distance the things he could eat. He had long finished his meal and was only lying lazily on the same spot when his sister turned the key slowly as a sign for him to retreat. That roused him at once, although he was nearly asleep, and he hurried under the sofa again. But it took considerable self-control for him to stay under the sofa, even for the short time his sister was in the room, since the large meal had swollen his body somewhat and he was so cramped he could hardly breathe. Slight attacks of breathlessness afflicted him and his eyes were starting a little out of his head as he watched his unsuspecting sister sweeping together with a broom not only the remains of what he had eaten but even the things he had not touched, as if these were now of no use to anyone, and hastily shoveling it all into a bucket, which she covered with a wooden lid and carried away. Hardly had she turned her back when Gregor came from under the sofa and stretched and puffed himself out.

In this manner Gregor was fed, once in the early morning while his parents and the servant girl were still asleep, and a second time

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after they had all had their midday dinner, for then his parents took a short nap and the servant girl could be sent out on some errand or other by his sister. Not that they would have wanted him to starve, of course, but perhaps they could not have borne to know more about his feeding than from hearsay, perhaps too his sister wanted to spare them such little anxieties wherever possible, since they had quite enough to bear as it was.

Under what pretext the doctor and the locksmith had been got rid of on that first morning Gregor could not discover, for since what he said was not understood by the others it never struck any of them, not even his sister, that he could understand what they said, and so whenever his sister came into his room he had to content himself with hearing her utter only a sigh now and then and an occasional appeal to the saints. Later on, when she had got a little used to the situation—of course she could never get completely used to it—she sometimes threw out a remark which was kindly meant or could be so interpreted. "Well, he liked his dinner today," she would say when Gregor had made a good clearance of his food; and when he had not eaten, which gradually happened more and more often, she would say almost sadly: "Everything's been left standing again."

But although Gregor could get no news directly, he overheard a lot from the neighboring rooms, and as soon as voices were audible, he would run to the door of the room concerned and press his whole body against it. In the first few days especially there was no conversation that did not refer to him somehow, even if only indirectly. For two whole days there were family consultations at every mealtime about what should be done; but also between meals the same subject was discussed, for there were always at least two members of the family at home, since no one wanted to be alone in the flat and to leave it quite empty was unthinkable. And on the very first of these days the household cook—it was not quite clear what and how much she knew of the situation—went down on her knees to his mother and begged leave to go, and when she departed, a quarter of an hour later, gave thanks for her dismissal with tears in her eyes as if for the greatest benefit that could have been conferred on her, and without any prompting swore a solemn oath that she would never say a single word to anyone about what had happened.

Now Gregor's sister had to cook too, helping her mother; true the cooking did not amount to much, for they ate scarcely anything. Gregor was always hearing one of the family vainly urging another to eat and getting no answer but: "Thanks, I've had all I want," or something similar. Perhaps they drank nothing either. Time and again his sister kept asking his father if he wouldn't like some beer and offered kindly to go and fetch it herself, and when he made no answer suggested that she could ask the concierge to fetch it, so that he need feel no sense of obligation, but then a round "No" came from his father and no more was said about it.

IN THE course of that very first day Gregor's father explained the family's financial position and prospects to both his mother and his sister. Now and then he rose from the table to get some voucher or memorandum out of the small safe he had rescued from the collapse of his business five years earlier. One could hear him opening the complicated lock and rustling papers out and shutting it again. This statement made by his father was the first cheerful information Gregor had heard since his imprisonment. He had been of the opinion that nothing at all was left over from his father's business, at least his father had never said anything to the contrary, and of course he had not asked him directly. At that time Gregor's sole desire was to do his utmost to help the family to forget as soon as possible the catastrophe which had overwhelmed the busines and thrown them all into a state of complete despair. And so he had set to work with unusual ardor and almost overnight had become a commercial traveler instead of a little clerk, with of course much greater chances of earning money, and his success was immediately translated into good round coin which he could lay on the table for his amazed and happy family. These had been fine times, and they had never recurred, at least not with the same sense of glory, although later on Gregor had earned so much money that he was able to meet the expenses of the whole household and did so. They had simply got used to it, both the family and Gregor; the money was gratefully accepted and gladly given, but there was no special uprush of warm feeling. With his sister alone had he remained intimate, and it was a secret plan of his that she, who loved music, unlike himself, and could play movingly on the violin, should be sent next year to study at the Conservatorium, despite the great expense that would entail, which must be made up in some other way. During his brief visits home the Conservatorium was often mentioned in the talks he had with his sister, but always merely as a beautiful dream which could never come true, and his parents discouraged even these innocent references to it; yet Gregor had made up his mind firmly about it and meant to announce the fact with due solemnity on Christmas Day.

Such were the thoughts, completely futile in

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his present condition, that went through his head as he stood clinging upright to the door and listening. Sometimes out of sheer weariness he had to give up listening and let his head fall negligently against the door, but he always had to pull himself together again at once, for even the slight sound his head made was audible next door and brought all conversation to a stop. "What can he be doing now?" his father would say after a while, obviously turning towards the door, and only then would the interrupted conversation gradually be set going again.

Gregor was now informed as amply as he could wish—for his father tended to repeat himself in his explanations, partly because it was a long time since he had handled such matters and partly because his mother could not always grasp things at once—that a certain amount of investments, a very small amount it was true, had survived the wreck of their fortunes and had even increased a little because the dividends had not been touched meanwhile. And besides that, the money Gregor brought home every month—he had kept only a few dollars for himself—had never been quite used up and now amounted to a small capital sum. Behind the door Gregor nodded his head eagerly, rejoiced at this evidence of unexpected thrift and foresight. True, he could really have paid off some more of his father's debts to the chief with this extra money, and so brought much nearer the day on which he could quit his job, but doubtless it was better the way his father had arranged it.

Yet this capital was by no means sufficient to let the family live on the interest of it; for one year, perhaps, or at the most two, they could live on the principal, that was all. It was simply a sum that ought not to be touched and should be kept for a rainy day; money for living expenses would have to be earned. Now his father was still hale enough but an old man, and he had done no work for the past five years and could not be expected to do much; during these five years, the first years of leisure in his laborius though unsuccessful life, he had grown rather fat and become sluggish. And Gregor's old mother, how was she to earn a living with her asthma, which troubled her even when she walked through the flat and kept her lying on a sofa every other day panting for breath beside an open window? And was his sister to earn her bread, she who was still a child of seventeen and whose life hitherto had been so pleasant, consisting as it did in dressing herself nicely, sleeping long, helping in the housekeeping, going out to a few modest entertainments and above all playing the violin? At first whenever the need for earning money was mentioned Gregor let go his hold on the door and threw himself down on the cool leather sofa beside it, he felt so hot with shame and grief.

OFTEN he just lay there the long nights through without sleeping at all, scrabbling for hours on the leather. Or he nerved himself to the great effort of pushing an armchair to the window, then crawled up over the window sill and, braced against the chair, leaned against the window panes, obviously in some recollection of the sense of freedom that looking out of a window always used to give him. For in reality day by day things that were even a little way off were growing dimmer to his sight; the hospital across the street, which he used to execrate for being all too often before his eyes, was now quite beyond his range of vision, and if he had not known that he lived in Charlotte Street, a quiet street but still a city street, he might have believed that his window gave on a desert waste where gray sky and gray land blended indistinguishably into each other. His quick-witted sister only needed to observe twice that the armchair stood by the window; after that whenever she had tidied the room she always pushed the chair back to the same place at the window and even left the inner casements open.

If he could have spoken to her and thanked her for all she had to do for him, he could have borne her ministrations better; as it was, they oppressed him. She certainly tried to make as light as possible of whatever was disagreeable in her task, and as time went on she succeeded, of course, more and more, but time brought more enlightenment to Gregor too. The very way she came in distressed him. Hardly was she in the room when she rushed to the window, without even taking time to shut the door, careful as she was usually to shield the sight of Gregor's room from the others, and as if she were almost suffocating tore the casements open with hasty fingers, standing then in the open draught for a while even in the bitterest cold and drawing deep breaths. This noisy scurry of hers upset Gregor twice a day; he would crouch trembling under the sofa all the time, knowing quite well that she would certainly have spared him such a disturbance had she found it at all possible to stay in his presence without opening the window.

On one occasion, about a month after Gregor's metamorphosis, when there was surely no reason for her to be still startled at his appearance, she came a little earlier than usual and found him gazing out of the window, quite motionless, and thus well placed to look like a bogey. Gregor would not have been surprised had she not come in at all, for she could not immediately open the window while he

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was there, but not only did she retreat, she jumped back as if in alarm and banged the door shut; a stranger might well have thought that he had been lying in wait for her there meaning to bite her. Of course he hid himself under the sofa at once, but he had to wait until midday before she came again, and she seemed more ill at ease than usual. This made him realize how repulsive the sight of him still was to her, and that it was bound to go on being repulsive, and what an effort it must cost her not to run away even from the sight of the small portion of his body that stuck out from under the sofa. In order to spare her that, therefore, one day he carried a sheet on his back to the sofa—it cost him four hours' labor—and arranged it there in such a way as to hide him completely, so that even if she were to bend down she could not see him. Had she considered the sheet unnecessary, she would certainly have stripped it off the sofa again, for it was clear enough that this curtaining and confining of himself was not likely to conduce to Gregor's comfort, but she left it where it was, and Gregor even fancied that he caught a thankful glance from her eye when he lifted the sheet carefully a very little with his head to see how she was taking the new arrangement.

For the first fortnight his parents could not bring themselves to the point of entering his room, and he often heard them expressing their appreciation of his sister's activities, whereas formerly they had frequently scolded her for being as they thought a somewhat useless daughter. But now, both of them often waited outside the door, his father and his mother, while his sister tidied his room, and as soon as she came out she had to tell them exactly how things were in the room, what Gregor had eaten, how he had conducted himself this time and whether there was not perhaps some slight improvement in his condition. His mother, moreover, began relatively soon to want to visit him, but his father and sister dissuaded her at first with arguments which Gregor listened to very attentively and altogether approved. Later, however, she had to be held back by main force, and when she cried out: "Do let me in to Gregor, he is my unfortunate son! Can't you understand that I must go to him?" Gregor thought that it might be well to have her come in, not every day, of course, but perhaps once a week; she understood things, after all, much better than his sister, who was only a child and had perhaps taken on the task merely out of childish thoughtlessness.

GREGOR'S desire to see his mother was soon fulfilled. During the daytime he did not want to show himself at the window, out of

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consideration for his parents, but he could not crawl very far around the few square yards of floor space he had, nor could he bear lying quietly at rest all during the night, while he was fast losing any interest he had ever taken in food, so that for mere recreation he had formed the habit of crawling crisscross over the walls and ceiling. He especially enjoyed hanging suspended from the ceiling; it was much better than lying on the floor; one could breathe more freely; one's body swung and rocked lightly; and in the almost blissful absorption induced by this suspension it could happen to his own surprise that he let go and fell plump on the floor. Yet he now had his body much better under control than formerly, and even such a big fall did him no harm. His sister at once remarked the new distraction Gregor had found for himself—he left traces behind him of the sticky stuff on his soles wherever he crawled—and she got the idea in her head of giving him as wide a field as possible to crawl in and of removing the pieces of furniture that hindered him, above all the chest of drawers and the writing desk. But that was more than she could manage all by herself; she did not dare ask her father to help her; and as for the servant girl, a young creature of sixteen who had had the courage to stay on after the cook's departure, she could not be asked to help, for she had begged as an especial favor that she might keep the kitchen door locked and open it only on a definite summons: so there was nothing left but to apply to her mother at an hour when her father was out. And the old lady did come, with exclamations of joyful eagerness, which, however, died away at the door of Gregor's room. Gregor's sister, of course, went in first, to see that everything was in order before letting his mother enter. In great haste Gregor pulled the sheet lower and rucked it more in folds so that it really looked as if it had been thrown accidentally over the sofa. And this time he did not peer out from under it; he renounced the pleasure of seeing his mother on this occasion and was only glad that she had come at all. "Come in, he's out of sight," said his sister, obviously leading her mother in by the hand. Gregor could now hear the two women struggling to shift the heavy old chest from its place, and his sister claiming the greater part of the labor for herself, without listening to the admonitions of her mother who feared she might overstrain herself.

It took them a long time. After at least a quarter of an hour's tugging his mother objected that the chest had better be left where it was, for in the first place it was too heavy and could never be got out before his father came home, and standing in the middle of the room like that it would only hamper Gregor's movements, while in the second place it was not at all certain that removing the furniture would be doing a service to Gregor. She was inclined to think to the contrary; the sight of the naked walls made her own heart heavy, and why shouldn't Gregor have the same feeling, considering that he had been used to his furniture for so long and might feel forlorn without it. "And doesn't it look," she concluded in a low voice—in fact she had been almost whispering all the time as if to avoid letting Gregor, whose exact whereabouts she did not know, hear even the tones of her voice, for she was convinced that he could not understand her words—"doesn't it look as if we were showing him, by taking away his furniture, that we have given up hope of his ever getting better and are just leaving him coldly to himself? I think it would be best to keep his room exactly as it has always been, so that when he comes back to us he will find everything unchanged and be able all the more easily to forget what has happened in between."

On hearing these words from his mother Gregor realized that the lack of all direct human speech for the past two months together with the monotony of family life must have confused his mind, otherwise he could not account for the fact that he had quite earnestly looked forward to having his room emptied of furnishing. Did he really want his warm room, so comfortably fitted with old family furniture, to be turned into a naked den in which he would certainly be able to crawl unhampered in all directions but at the price of shedding simultaneously all recollection of his human background? He had indeed been so near the brink of forgetfulness that only the voice of his mother, which he had not heard for so long, had drawn him back from it. Nothing should be taken out of his room; everything must stay as it was; he could not dispense with the good influence of the furniture on his state of mind; and even if the furniture did hamper him in his senseless crawling round and round, that was no drawback but a great advantage.

Unfortunately his sister was of the contrary opinion; she had grown accustomed, and not without reason, to consider herself an expert in Gregor's affairs as against her parents, and so her mother's advice was now enough to make her determined on the removal not only of the chest and the writing desk, which had been her first intention, but of all the furniture except the indispensable sofa. This determination was not, of course, merely the outcome of childish recalcitrance and of the self-confidence she had recently developed so unexpectedly and at such cost; she had in fact

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perceived that Gregor needed a lot of space to crawl about in, while on the other hand he never used the furniture at all, so far as could be seen. Another factor might have been also the enthusiastic temperament of an adolescent girl, which seeks to indulge itself on every opportunity and which now tempted Grete to exaggerate the horror of her brother's circumstances in order that she might do all the more for him. In a room where Gregor lorded it all alone over empty walls no one save herself was likely ever to set foot.

And so she was not to be moved from her resolve and her mother, who seemed moreover to be ill at ease in Gregor's room and therefore unsure of herself, was soon reduced to silence and helped her daughter as best she could to push the chest outside. Now, Gregor could do without the chest, if need be, but the writing desk he must retain. As soon as the two women had got the chest out of his room, groaning as they pushed it, Gregor stuck his head out from under the sofa to see how he might intervene as kindly and cautiously as possible. But as bad luck would have it, his mother was the first to return, leaving Grete clasping the chest in the room next door where she was trying to shift it all by herself, without of course moving it from the spot. His mother, however, was not accustomed to the sight of him, it might sicken her and so in alarm Gregor backed quickly to the other end of the sofa, yet could not prevent the sheet from swaying a little in front. That was enough to put her on the alert. She paused, stood still for a moment, and then went back to Grete.

ALTHOUGH Gregor kept reassuring himself that nothing out of the way was happening, but only a few bits of furniture were being changed round, he soon had to admit that all this trotting to and fro of the two women, their little ejaculations and the scraping of furniture along the floor affected him like a vast disturbance coming from all sides at once, and however much he tucked in his head and legs and cowered to the very floor he was bound to confess that he would not be able to stand it for long. They were clearing his room out; taking away everything he loved: the chest in which he kept his fret saw and other tools was already dragged off; they were now loosening the writing desk which had almost sunk into the floor, the desk at which he had done all his homework when he was at the commercial academy, at the grammar school before that, and, yet, even at the primary school—he had no more time to waste in weighing the good intentions of the two women, whose existence he had by now almost forgotten, for they were so exhausted that they were laboring in silence and nothing could be heard but the heavy scuffling of their feet.

And so he rushed out—the women were just leaning against the writing desk in the next room to give themselves a breather—and four times changed his direction, since he really did not know what to rescue first, then on the wall opposite, which was already otherwise cleared, he was struck by the picture of the lady muffled in so much fur and quickly crawled up to it and pressed himself to the glass, which was a good surface to hold on to and comforted his hot belly. This picture at least, which was entirely hidden beneath him, was going to be removed by nobody. He turned his head towards the door of the living room so as to observe the women when they came back.

They had not allowed themselves much of a rest and were already coming; Grete had twined her arm round her mother and was almost supporting her. "Well, what shall we take now?" said Grete, looking round. Her eyes met Gregor's from the wall. She kept her composure, presumably because of her mother, bent her head down to her mother, to keep her from looking up, and said, although in a fluttering, unpremeditated voice: "Come, hadn't we better go back to the living room for a moment?" Her intentions were clear enough to Gregor, she wanted to bestow her mother in safety and then chase him down from the wall. Well, just let her try it! He clung to his picture and would not give it up. He would rather fly in Grete's face.

But Grete's words had succeeded in disquieting her mother, who took a step to one side, caught sight of the huge brown mass on the flowered wallpaper, and before she was really conscious that what she saw was Gregor screamed in a loud, hoarse voice: "Oh God, oh God!", fell with outspread arms over the sofa as if giving up and did not move. "Gregor!" cried his sister, shaking her fist and glaring at him. This was the first time she had directly addressed him since his metamorphosis. She ran into the next room for some aromatic essence with which to rouse her mother from her fainting fit. Gregor wanted to help too—there was still time to rescue the picture—but he was stuck fast to the glass and had to tear himself loose; he then ran after his sister into the next room as if he could advise her, as he used to do; but then had to stand helplessly behind her; she meanwhile searched among various small bottles and when she turned round started in alarm at the sight of him; one bottle fell on the floor and broke; a splinter of glass cut Gregor's face and some

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kind of corrosive medicine splashed him; without pausing a moment longer Grete gathered up all the bottles she could carry and ran to her mother with them; she banged the door shut with her foot. Gregor was not cut off from his mother, who was perhaps nearly dying because of him; he dared not open the door for fear of frightening away his sister, who had to stay with her mother; there was nothing he could do but wait; and harassed by self-reproach and worry he began now to crawl to and fro, over everything, walls, furniture and ceiling, and finally in his despair, when the whole room seemed to be reeling round him, fell down on to the middle of the big table.

A LITTLE while elapsed, Gregor was still lying there feebly and all around was quiet, perhaps that was a good omen. Then the doorbell rang. The servant girl was of course locked in her kitchen, and Grete would have to open the door. It was his father. "What's been happening?" were his first words; Grete's face must have told him everything. Grete answered in a muffled voice, apparently hiding her head on his breast: "Mother has been fainting, but she's better now. Gregor's broken loose." "Just what I expected," said his father, "just what I've been telling you, but you women would never listen." It was clear to Gregor that his father had taken the worst interpretation of Grete's all too brief statement and was assuming that Gregor had been guilty of some violent act. Therefore Gregor must now try to propitiate his father, since he had neither time nor means for an explanation. And so he fled to the door of his own room and crouched against it, to let his father see as soon as he came in from the hall that his son had the good intention of getting back into his room immediately and that it was not necessary to drive him there, but that if only the door were opened he would disappear at once.

Yet his father was not in the mood to perceive such fine distinctions. "Ah!" he cried as soon as he appeared, in a tone which sounded at once angry and exultant. Gregor drew his head back from the door and lifted it to look at his father. Truly, this was not the father he had imagined to himself; admittedly he had been too absorbed of late in his new recreation of crawling over the ceiling to take the same interest as before in what was happening elsewhere in the flat, and he ought really to be prepared for some changes. And yet, and yet, could that be his father? The man who used to lie wearily sunk in bed whenever Gregor set out on a business journey; who welcomed him back of an evening lying in a long chair in a dressing gown; who could not really rise to his feet but only lifted his arms in greeting, and on the rare occassions when he did go out with his family, on one or two Sundays a year and on high holidays, walked between Gregor and his mother, who were slow walkers anyhow, even more slowly than they did, muffled in his old greatcoat, shuffling laboriously forward with the help of his crook-handled stick which he set down most cautiously at every step and, whenever he wanted to say anything, nearly always came to a full stop and gathered his escort around him? Now he was standing there in fine shape; dressed in a smart blue uniform with gold buttons, such as bank messengers wear; his strong double chin bulged over the stiff high collar of his jacket; from under his bushy eyebrows his black eyes darted fresh and penetrating glances; his one time tangled white hair had been combed flat on either side of a shining and carefully exact parting. He pitched his cap, which bore a gold monogram, probably the badge of some bank, in a wide sweep across the whole room on to a sofa and with the tailends of his jacket thrown back, his hands in his trouser pockets, advanced with a grim visage towards Gregor. Likely enough he did not himself know what he meant to do; at any rate he lifted his feet uncommonly high, and Gregor was dumbfounded at the enormous size of his shoe soles. But Gregor could not risk standing up to him, aware as he had been from the very first day of his new life that his father believed only the severest measures suitable for dealing with him. And so he ran before his father, stopping when he stopped and scuttling forward again when his father made any kind of move. In this way they circled the room several times without anything decisive happening, indeed the whole operation did not even look like a pursuit because it was carried out so slowly. And so Gregor did not leave the floor, for he feared that his father might take as a piece of peculiar wickedness any excursion of his over the walls or the ceiling. All the same, he could not stay this course much longer, for while his father took one step he had to carry out a whole series of movements. He was already beginning to feel breathless; just as in his former life his lungs had not been very dependable. As he was staggering along, trying to concentrate his energy on running, hardly keeping his eyes open; in his dazed state never even thinking of any other escape than simply going forward; and having almost forgotten that the walls were free to him, which in this room were well provided with finely carved pieces of furniture full of knobs and crevices—suddenly something lightly flung landed close

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When she met no resistance, her attention was aroused. . . .

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behind him and rolled before him. It was an apple; a second apple followed immediately; Gregor came to a stop in alarm; there was no point in running on, for his father was determined to bombard him. He had filled his pockets with fruit from the dish on the sideboard and was now shying apple after apple, without taking particularly good aim for the moment. The small red apples rolled about the floor as if magnetized and cannoned into each other. An apple thrown without much force grazed Gregor's back and glanced off harmlessly. But another following immediately landed right on his back and sank in; Gregor wanted to drag himself forward, as if this startling, incredible pain could be left behind him; but he felt as if nailed to the spot and flattened himself out in a complete derangement of all his senses. With his last conscious look he saw the door of his room being torn open and his mother rushing out ahead of his screaming sister, in her underbodice, for her daughter had loosened her clothing to let her breathe more freely and recover from her swoon, he saw his mother rushing towards his father, leaving one after another behind her on the floor her loosened petticoats, stumbling over her petticoats straight to his father and embracing him, in complete union with him—but here Gregor's sight began to fail—with her hands clasped round his father's neck as she begged for her son's life.

Chapter Three

THE serious injury done to Gregor, which disabled him for more than a month—the apple went on sticking in his body as a visible reminder, since no one ventured to remove it—seemed to have made even his father recollect that Gregor was a member of the family, despite his present unfortunate and repulsive shape, and ought not to be treated as an enemy, that, on the contrary, family duty required the suppression of disgust and the exercise of patience, nothing but patience.

And although his injury had impaired, probably for ever, his powers of movement, and for the time being it took him long, long minutes to creep across his room like an old invalid—there was no question now of crawling up the wall—yet in his own opinion he was sufficiently compensated for this worsening of his condition by the fact that towards evening the living-room door, which he used to watch intently for an hour or two beforehand, was always thrown open, so that lying in the darkness of his room, invisible to the family, he could see them all at the lamp-lit table and listen to their talk, by general consent as it were, very different from his earlier eavesdropping.

True, their intercourse lacked the lively character of former times, which he had always called to mind with a certain wistfulness in the small hotel bedrooms where he had been wont to throw himself down, tired out, on damp bedding. They were now mostly very silent. Soon after supper his father would fall asleep in his armchair; his mother and sister would admonish each to be silent; his mother, bending low over the lamp, stitched at fine sewing for an underwear firm; his sister, who had taken a job as a salesgirl, was learning shorthand and French in the evenings on the chance of bettering herself. Sometimes his father woke up, and as if quite unaware that he had been sleeping said to his mother: "What a lot of sewing you're doing today!" and at once fell asleep again, while the two women exchanged a tired smile.

With a kind of mulishness his father persisted in keeping his uniform on even in the house; his dressing gown hung uselessly on its peg and he slept fully dressed where he sat, as if he were ready for service at any moment and even here only at the beck and call of his superior. As a result, his uniform, which was not brand-new to start with, began to look dirty, despite all the loving care of the mother and sister to keep it clean, and Gregor often spent whole evenings gazing at the many greasy spots on the garment, gleaming with gold buttons always in a high state of polish, in which the old man sat sleeping in extreme discomfort and yet quite peacefully.

As soon as the clock struck ten his mother tried to rouse his father with gentle words and to persuade him after that to get into bed, for sitting there he could not have a proper sleep and that was what he needed most, since he had to go on duty at six. But with the mulishness that had obsessed him since he became a bank messenger he always insisted on staying longer at the table, although he regularly fell asleep again and in the end only with the greatest trouble could be got out of his armchair and into his bed. However insistently Gregor's mother and sister kept urging him with gentle reminders, he would go on slowly shaking his head for a quarter of an hour, keeping his eyes shut, and refuse to get to his feet. The mother plucked at his sleeve, whispering endearments in his ear, the sister left her lessons to come to her mother's help, but Gregor's father was not to be caught. He would only sink down deeper in his chair. Not until the two women hoisted him up by the armpits did he open his eyes and look at them both, one after the other, usually with

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the remark: "This is a life. This is the peace and quiet of my old age." And leaning on the two of them he would heave himself up, with difficulty, as if he were a great burden to himself, suffer them to lead him as far as the door and then wave them off and go on alone, while the mother abandoned her needlework and the sister her pen in order to run after him and help him farther.

Who could find time, in this overworked and tired-out family, to bother about Gregor more than was absolutely needful? The household was reduced more and more; the servant girl was turned off; a gigantic bony charwoman with white hair flying round her head came in morning and evening to do the rough work; everything else was done by Gregor's mother, as well as great piles of sewing. Even various family ornaments, which his mother and sister used to wear with pride at parties and celebrations, had to be sold, as Gregor discovered of an evening from hearing them all discuss the prices obtained. But what they lamented most was the fact that they could not leave the flat which was much too big for their present circumstances, because they could not think of any way to shift Gregor. Yet Gregor saw well enough that consideration for him was not the main difficulty preventing the removal, for they could have easily shifted him in some suitable box with a few air holes in it; what really kept them from moving into another flat was rather their own complete hopelessness and the belief that they had been singled out for a misfortune such as had never happened to any of their relations or acquaintances. They fulfilled to the uttermost all that the world demands of poor people, the father fetched breakfast for the small clerks in the bank, the mother devoted her energy to making underwear for strangers, the sister trotted to and fro behind the counter at the behest of customers, but more than this they had not the strength to do. And the wound in Gregor's back began to nag at him afresh when his mother and sister, after getting his father into bed, came back again, left their work lying, drew close to each other and sat cheek by cheek; when his mother, pointing towards his room, said: "Shut that door now, Grete," and he was left again in darkness, while next door the women mingled their tears or perhaps sat dry-eyed staring at the table.

GREGOR hardly slept at all by night or by day. He was often haunted by the idea that next time the door opened he would take the family's affairs in hand again just as he used to do; once more, after this long interval, there appeared in his thoughts the figures of the chief and the chief clerk, the commercial travelers and the apprentices, the porter who was so dull-witted, two or three friends in other firms, a chambermaid in one of the rural hotels, a sweet and fleeting memory, a cashier in a milliner's shop, whom he had wooed earnestly but too slowly—they all appeared, together with strangers or people he had quite forgotten, but instead of helping him and his family they were one and all unapproachable and he was glad when they vanished. At other times he would not be in the mood to bother about his family, he was only filled with rage at the way they were neglecting him, and although he had no clear idea of what he might care to eat he would make plans for getting into the larder to take the food that was after all his due, even if he were not hungry. His sister no longer took thought to bring him what might especially please him, but in the morning and at noon before she went to business hurriedly pushed into his room with her foot any food that was available, and in the evening cleared it out again with one sweep of the broom, heedless of whether it had been merely tasted, or—as most frequently happened—left untouched. The cleaning of his room, which she now did always in the evenings, could not have been more hastily done. Streaks of dirt stretched along the walls, here and there lay balls of dust and filth. At first Gregor used to station himself in some particularly filthy corner when his sister arrived, in order to reproach her with it, so to speak. But he could have sat there for weeks without getting her to make any improvement; she could see the dirt as well as he did, but she had simply made up her mind to leave it alone. And yet, with a touchiness that was new to her, which seemed anyhow to have infected the whole family, she jealously guarded her claim to be the sole caretaker of Gregor's room. His mother once subjected his room to a thorough cleaning, which was achieved only by means of several buckets of water—all this dampness of course upset Gregor too and he lay widespread, sulky and motionless on the sofa—but she was well punished for it. Hardly had his sister noticed the changed aspect of his room that evening than she rushed in high dudgeon into the living room and, despite the imploringly raised hands of her mother, burst into a storm of weeping, while her parents—her father had of course been startled out of his chair—looked on at first in helpless amazement; then they too began to go into action; the father reproached the mother on his right for not having left the cleaning of Gregor's room to his sister; shrieked at the sister on his left that never again was she to be allowed to clean

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Gregor's room; while the mother tried to pull the father into his bedroom, since he was beyond himself with agitation; the sister, shaken with sobs, then beat upon the table with her small fists; and Gregor hissed loudly with rage because not one of them thought of shutting the door to spare him such a spectacle and so much noise.

Still, even if the sister, exhausted by her daily work, had grown tired of looking after Gregor as she did formerly, there was no need for his mother's intervention or for Gregor's being neglected at all. The charwoman was there. This old widow, whose strong bony frame had enabled her to survive the worst a long life could offer, by no means recoiled from Gregor. Without being in the least curious she had once by chance opened the door of his room and at the sight of Gregor, who, taken by surprise, began to rush to and fro although no one was chasing him, merely stood there with her arms folded. From that time she never failed to open his door a little for a moment, morning and evening, to have a look at him. At first she even used to call him to her, with words which apparently she took to be friendly, such as "Come along, then, you old dung beetle!" or "Look at the old dung beetle, then!" To such allocutions Gregor made no answer, but stayed motionless where he was, as if the door had never been opened. Instead of being allowed to disturb him so senselessly whenever the whim took her, she should rather have been ordered to clean out his room daily, that charwoman! Once, early in the morning—heavy rain was lashing on the window-panes, perhaps a sign that spring was on the way—Gregor was so exasperated when she began addressing him again that he ran at her, as if to attack her, although slowly and feebly enough. But the charwoman instead of showing fright merely lifted high a chair that happened to be beside the door, and as she stood there with her mouth wide open it was clear that she meant to shut it only when she brought the chair down on Gregor's back. "So you're not coming any nearer?" she asked, as Gregor turned away again, and quietly put the chair back into the corner.

GREGOR was now eating hardly anything. Only when he happened to pass the food laid out for him did he take a bit of something in his mouth as a pastime, kept it there for an hour at a time and usually spat it out again. At first he thought it was chagrin over the state of his room that prevented him from eating, yet he soon got used to the various changes in his room. It had become a habit in the family to push into his room things there was no room for elsewhere, and there were plenty of these now, since one of the rooms had been let to three lodgers. These serious gentlemen—all three of them with full beards, as Gregor once observed through a crack in the door—had a passion for order, not only in their own room but, since they were now members of the household, in all its arrangements, especially in the kitchen. Superfluous, not to say dirty, objects they could not bear. Besides, they had brought with them most of the furnishings they needed. For this reason many things could be dispensed with that it was no use trying to sell but that should not be thrown away either. All of them found their way into Gregor's room. The ash can likewise and the kitchen garbage can. Anything that was not needed for the moment was simply flung into Gregor's room by the charwoman, who did everything in a hurry; fortunately Gregor usually saw only the object, whatever it was, and the hand that held it. Perhaps she intended to take the things away again as time and opportunity offered, or to collect them until she could throw them all out in a heap, but in fact they just lay wherever she happened to throw them, except when Gregor pushed his way through the junk heap and shifted it somewhat, at first out of necessity, because he had not room enough to crawl, but later with increasing enjoyment, although after such excursions, being sad and weary to death, he would lie motionless for hours. And since the lodgers often ate their supper at home in the common living room, the living-room door stayed shut many an evening, yet Gregor reconciled himself quite easily to the shutting of the door, for often enough on evenings when it was opened he had disregarded it entirely and lain in the darkest corner of his room, quite unnoticed by the family. But on one occasion the charwoman left the door open a little and it stayed ajar even when the lodgers came in for supper and the lamp was lit. They set themselves at the top end of the table where formerly Gregor and his father and mother had eaten their meals, unfolded their napkins and took knife and fork in hand. At once his mother appeared in the other doorway with a dish of meat and close behind her his sister with a dish of potatoes piled high. The food steamed with a thick vapor. The lodgers bent over the food set before them as if to scrutinize it before eating, in fact the man in the middle, who seemed to pass for an authority with the other two, cut a piece of meat as it lay on the dish, obviously to discover if it were tender or should be sent back to the kitchen. He showed satisfaction, and Gregor's mother and sister, who had been watching

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anxiously, breathed freely and began to smile.

The family itself took its meals in the kitchen. None the less, Gregor's father came into the living room before going into the kitchen and with one prolonged bow, cap in hand, made a round of the table. The lodgers all stood up and murmured something in their beards. When they were alone again they ate their food in almost complete silence. It seemed remarkable to Gregor that among the various noises coming from the table he could always distinguish the sound of their masticating teeth, as if this were a sign to Gregor that one needed teeth in order to eat, and that with toothless jaws even of the finest make one could do nothing. "I'm hungry enough," said Gregor sadly to himself, "but not for that kind of food. How these lodgers are stuffing themselves, and here am I dying of starvation!"

On that very evening—during the whole of his time there Gregor could not remember ever having heard the violin—the sound of violin-playing came from the kitchen. The lodgers had already finished their supper, the one in the middle had brought out a newspaper and given the other two a page apiece, and now they were leaning back at ease reading and smoking. When the violin began to play they pricked up their ears, got to their feet, and went on tiptoe to the hall door where they stood huddled together. Their movements must have been heard in the kitchen, for Gregor's father called out: "Is the violin-playing disturbing you, gentlemen? It can be stopped at once." "On the contrary," said the middle lodger, "could not Fräulein Samsa come and play in this room, beside us, where it is much more convenient and comfortable?" "Oh certainly," cried Gregor's father, as if he were the violin-player. The lodgers came back into the living room and waited. Presently Gregor's father arrived with the music stand, his mother carrying the music and his sister with the violin. His sister quietly made everything ready to start playing; his parents, who had never let rooms before and so had an exaggerated idea of the courtesy due to lodgers, did not venture to sit down on their own chairs; his father leaned against the door, the right hand thrust between two buttons of his livery coat, which was formally buttoned up; but his mother was offered a chair by one of the lodgers and, since she left the chair just where he had happened to put it, sat down in a corner to one side.

Gregor's sister began to play; the father and mother, from either side, intently watched the movements of her hands. Gregor, attracted by the playing, ventured to move forward a little until his head was actually inside the living room. He felt hardly any surprise at his growing lack of consideration for the others; there had been a time when he prided himself on being considerate. And yet just on this occasion he had more reason than ever to hide himself, since owing to the amount of dust which lay thick in his room and rose into the air at the slightest movement, he too was covered with dust; fluff and hair and remnants of food trailed with him, caught on his back and along his sides; his indifference to everything was much too great for him to turn on his back and scrape himself clean on the carpet, as once he had done several times a day. And in spite of his condition, no shame deterred him from advancing a little over the spotless floor of the living room.

TO BE sure, no one was aware of him. The family was entirely absorbed in the violin-playing; the lodgers, however, who first of all had stationed themselves, hands in pockets, much too close behind the music stand so that they could all have read the music, which must have bothered his sister, had soon retreated to the window, half-whispering with downbent heads, and stayed there while his father turned an anxious eyes on them. Indeed, they were making it more than obvious that they had been disappointed in their expectation of hearing good or enjoyable violin-playing, that they had had more than enough of the performance and only out of courtesy suffered a continued disturbance of their peace. From the way they all kept blowing the smoke of their cigars high in the air through nose and mouth one could divine their irritation. And yet Gregor's sister was playing so beautifully. Her face leaned sideways, intently and sadly her eyes followed the notes of music. Gregor crawled a little farther forward and lowered his head to the ground so that it might be possible for his eyes to meet hers. Was he an animal, that music had such an effect upon him? He felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved. He was determined to push forward till he reached his sister, to pull at her skirt and so let her know that she was to come into his room with her violin, for no one here appreciated her playing as he would appreciate it. He would never let her out of his room, at least, not so long as he lived; his frightful appearance would become, for the first time, useful to him; he would watch all the doors of his room at once and spit at intruders; but his sister should need no constraint, she should stay with him of her own free will; she should sit beside him on the sofa, bend down her ear to him and hear him confide that he had had the firm intention of

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sending her to the Conservatorium, and that, but for his mishap, last Christmas—surely Christmas was long past?—he would have announced it to everybody without allowing a single objection. After this confession his sister would be so touched that she would burst into tears, and Gregor would then raise himself to her shoulder and kiss her on the neck, which, now that she went to business, she kept free of any ribbon or collar.

"Mr. Samsa!" cried the middle lodger, to Gregor's father, and pointed, without wasting any more words, at Gregor, now working himself slowly forwards. The violin fell silent, the middle lodger first smiled to his friends with a shake of the head and then looked at Gregor again. Instead of driving Gregor out, his father seemed to think it more needful to begin by soothing down the lodgers, although they were not at all agitated and apparently found Gregor more entertaining than the violin-playing. He hurried towards them and, spreading out his arms, tried to urge them back into their own room and at the same time to block their view of Gregor. They now began to be really a little angry, one could not tell whether because of the old man's behavior or because it had just dawned on them that all unwittingly they had such a neighbor as Gregor next door. They demanded explanations of his father, they waved their arms like him, tugged uneasily at their beards, and only with reluctance backed towards their room. Meanwhile Gregor's sister, who stood there as if lost when her playing was so abruptly broken off, came to life again, pulled herself together all at once after standing for a while holding violin and bow in nervelessly hanging hands and staring at her music, pushed her violin into the lap of her mother, who was still sitting in her chair fighting asthmatically for breath, and ran into the lodgers' room to which they were now being shepherded by her father rather more quickly than before. One could see the pillows and blankets on the beds flying under her accustomed fingers and being laid in order. Before the lodgers had actually reached their room she had finished making the beds and slipped out.

The old man seemed once more to be so possessed by his mulish self-assertiveness that he was forgetting all the respect he should show to his lodgers. He kept driving them on and driving them on until in the very door of the bedroom the middle lodger stamped his foot loudly on the floor and so brought him to a halt. "I beg to announce," said the lodger, lifting one hand and looking also at Gregor's mother and sister, "that because of the disgusting conditions prevailing in this household and family"—here he spat on the floor with emphatic brevity—"I give you notice on the spot. Naturally I won't pay you a penny for the days I have lived here, on the contrary I shall consider bringing an action for damages against you, based on claims—believe me—that will be easily susceptible of proof." He ceased and stared straight in front of him, as if he expected something. In fact his two friends at once rushed into the breach with these words: "And we too give notice on the spot." On that he seized the door-handle and shut the door with a slam.

Gregor's father, groping with his hands, staggered forward and fell into his chair; it looked as if he were stretching himself there for his ordinary evening nap, but the marked jerkings of his head, which was as if uncontrollable, showed that he was far from asleep. Gregor had simply stayed quietly all the time on the spot where the lodgers had espied him. Disappointment at the failure of his plan, perhaps also the weakness arising from extreme hunger, made it impossible for him to move. He feared, with a fair degree of certainty, that at any moment the general tension would discharge itself in a combined attack upon him, and he lay waiting. He did not react even to the noise made by the violin as it fell off his mother's lap from under her trembling fingers and gave out a resonant note.

"My dear parents," said his sister, slapping her hand on the table by way of introduction, "things can't go on like this. Perhaps you don't realize that, but I do. I won't utter my brother's name in the presence of this creature, and so all I say is: we must try to get rid of it. We've tried to look after it and to put up with it as far as is humanly possible, and I don't think anyone could reproach us in the slightest."

"She is more than right," said Gregor's father to himself. His mother, who was still choking for lack of breath, began to cough hollowly into her hand with a wild look in her eyes.

His sister rushed over to her and held her forehead. His father's thoughts seemed to have lost their vagueness at Grete's words, he sat more upright, fingering his service cap that lay among the plates still lying on the table from the lodgers' supper, and from time to time looked at the still form of Gregor.

"WE MUST try to get rid of it," his sister now said explicitly to her father, since her mother was coughing too much to hear a word, "it will be the death of both of you, I can see that coming. When one has to work as hard as we do, all of us, one can't stand this continual torment at home on top

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of it. At least I can't stand it any longer." And she burst into such a passion of sobbing that her tears dropped on her mother's face, where she wiped them off mechanically.

"My dear," said the old man sympathetically, and with evident understanding, "but what can we do?"

Gregor's sister merely shrugged her shoulders to indicate the feeling of helplessness that had now overmastered her during her weeping fit, in contrast to her former confidence.

"If he could understand us," said her father, half questioningly; Grete, still sobbing, vehemently waved a hand to show how unthinkable that was.

"If he could understand us," repeated the old man, shutting his eyes to consider his daughter's conviction that understanding was impossible, "then perhaps we might come to some agreement with him. But as it is—"

"He must go," cried Gregor's sister, "that's the only solution, Father. You must just try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor. The fact that we've believed it for so long is the root of all our trouble. But how can it be Gregor? If this were Gregor, he would have realized long ago that human beings can't live with such a creature, and he'd have gone away on his own accord. Then we wouldn't have any brother, but we'd be able to go on living and keep his memory in honor. As it is, this creature persecutes us, drives away our lodgers, obviously wants the whole apartment to himself and would have us all sleep in the gutter. Just look, Father," she shrieked all at once, "he's at it again!" And in an access of panic that was quite incomprehensible to Gregor she even quitted her mother, literally thrusting the chair from her as if she would rather sacrifice her mother than stay so near to Gregor, and rushed behind her father, who also rose up, being simply upset by her agitation, and half-spread his arms out as if to protect her.

Yet Gregor had not the slightest intention of frightening anyone, far less his sister. He had only begun to turn around in order to crawl back to his room, but it was certainly a startling operation to watch, since because of his disabled condition he could not execute the difficult turning movements except by lifting his head and then bracing it against the floor over and over again. He paused and looked round. His good intentions seemed to have been recognized; the alarm had only been momentary. Now they were all watching him in melancholy silence. His mother lay in her chair, her legs stiffly outstretched and pressed together, her eyes almost closing for sheer weariness; his father and his sister were sitting beside each other, his sister's arm around the old man' neck.

Perhaps I can go on turning round now, thought Gregor, and began his labors again. He could not stop himself from panting with the effort, and had to pause now and then to take breath. Nor did anyone harass him, he was left entirely to himself. When he had completed the turn-round he began at once to crawl straight back. He was amazed at the distance separating his from his room and could not understand how in his weak state he had managed to accomplish the same journey so recently, almost without remarking it. Intent on crawling as fast as possible, he barely noticed that not a single word, not an ejaculation from his family, interfered with his progress. Only when he was already in the doorway did he turn his head round, not completely, for his neck muscles were getting stiff, but enough to see that nothing had changed behind him except that his sister had risen to her feet. His last glance fell on his mother, who was not quite overcome by sleep.

Hardly was he well inside his room when the door was hastily pushed shut, bolted and locked. The sudden noise in his rear startled him so much that his little legs gave beneath him. It was his sister who had shown such haste. She had been standing ready waiting and had made a light spring forward, Gregor had not even heard her coming, and she cried "At last!" to her parents as she turned the key in the lock.

"And what now?" said Gregor to himself, looking round in the darkness. Soon he made the discovery that he was now unable to stir a limb. This did not surprise him, rather it seemed unnatural that he should ever actually have been able to move on these feeble little legs.

Otherwise he felt relatively comfortable. True, his whole body was aching, but it seemed that the pain was gradually growing less and would finally pass away. The rotting apple in his back and the inflamed area around it, all covered with soft dust, already hardly troubled him. He thought of his family with tenderness and love. The decision that he must disappear was one that he held to even more strongly than his sister, if that were possible. In this state of vacant and peaceful meditation he remained until the tower clock struck three in the morning. The first broadening of light in the world outside the window entered his consciousness once more.

Then his head sank onto the floor of its own accord and from his nostrils came the last faint flicker of his breath.

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WHEN the charwoman arrived early in the morning—what between her strength and her impatience she slammed all the doors so loudly, never mind how often she had been begged not to do so, that no one in the whole apartment could enjoy any quiet sleep after her arrival—she noticed nothing unusual as she took her customary peep into Gregor's room. She thought he was lying motionless on purpose, pretending to be in the sulks; she credited him with every kind of intelligence. Since she happened to have the long-handled broom in her hand she tried to tickle him up with it from the doorway. When that too produced no reaction she felt provoked and poked at him a little harder, and only when she had pushed him along the floor without meeting any resistance was her attention aroused. It did not take her long to establish the truth of the matter, and her eyes widened, she let out a whistle, yet did not waste much time over it but tore open the door of the Samsas' bedroom and yelled into the darkness at the top of her voice: "Just look at this, it's dead; it's lying here dead and done for!"

Mr. and Mrs. Samsa started up in their double bed and before they realized the nature of the charwoman's announcement had some difficulty in overcoming the shock of it. But then they got out of bed quickly, one on either side, Mr. Samsa throwing a blanket over his shoulders, Mrs. Samsa in nothing but her nightgown; in this array they entered Gregor's room. Meanwhile the door of the living room opened, too, where Grete had been sleeping since the advent of the lodgers; she was completely dressed as if she had not been to bed, which seemed to be confirmed also by the paleness of her face. "Dead?" said Mrs. Samsa, looking questioningly at the charwoman, although she could have investigated for herself, and the fact was obvious enough without investigation. "I should say so," said the charwoman, proving her words by pushing Gregor's corpse a long way to one side with her broomstick. Mrs. Samsa made a movement as if to stop her, but checked it. "Well," said Mr. Samsa, "now thanks be to God." He crossed himself, and the three women followed his example. Grete, whose eyes never left the corpse, said: "Just see how thin he was. It's such a long time since he's eaten anything. The food came out again just as it went in." Indeed, Gregor's body was completely flat and dry.

"Come in beside us, Grete, for a little while," said Mrs. Samsa with a tremulous smile, and Grete, not without looking back at the corpse, followed her parents into their bedroom. The charwoman shut the door and opened the window wide.

The three lodgers emerged from their room and were surprised to see no breakfast; they had been forgotten. "Where's our breakfast?" said the middle lodger peevishly to the charwoman. But she put her finger to her lips and hastily, without a word, indicated by gestures that they should go into Gregor's room. They did so and stood, their hands in the pockets of their somewhat shabby coats, around Gregor's corpse in the room where it was now fully light.

At that the door of the Samsas' bedroom opened and Mr. Samsa appeared in his uniform, his wife on one arm, his daughter on the other. They all looked a little as if they had been crying.

"Leave my house at once!" said Mr. Samsa, and pointed to the door without disengaging himself from the women. "What do you mean by that?" said the middle lodger, taken somewhat aback, with a feeble smile. The two others put their hands behind them and kept rubbing them together, as if in gleeful expectation of a fine set-to in which they were bound to come off the winners. "I mean just what I say," answered Mr. Samsa, and advanced in a straight line with his two companions towards the lodger. He stood his ground at first quietly, looking at the floor as if his thoughts were taking a new pattern in his head. "Then let us go, by all means," he said, and looked up at Mr. Samsa as if in a sudden access of humility he were expecting some renewed sanction for this decision. Mr. Samsa merely nodded briefly once or twice with meaning eyes. Upon that the lodger really did go with long strides into the hall, his two friends had been listening and had quite stopped rubbing their hands for some moments and now went scuttling after him as if afraid that Mr. Samsa might get into the hall before them and cut them off from their leader. In the hall they all three took their hats from the rack, their sticks from the umbrella stand, bowed in silence and quitted the apartment. With a suspiciousness which proved quite unfounded Mr. Samsa and the two women followed them out to the landing; leaning over the banister they watched the three figures slowly but surely going down the long stairs.

Mr. Samsa and the two women soon left the landing and as if a burden had been lifted from them went back into their apartment.

They decided to spend this day in resting and going for a stroll; they had not only deserved such a respite from work, but absolutely needed it. And so they sat down at the table and wrote three notes of excuse, Mr. Samsa to his board of management, Mrs. Samsa to her employer and Grete to the head

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of her firm. While they were writing, the charwoman came in to say that she was going now, since her morning's work was finished. At first they only nodded without looking up, but as she kept hovering there they eyed her irritably. "Well?" said Mr. Samsa. The charwoman stood grinning in the doorway as if she had good news to impart to the family but meant not to say a word unless properly questioned. The small ostrich feather standing upright on her hat, which had annoyed Mr. Samsa ever since she was engaged, was waving gaily in all directions. "Well, what is it then?" asked Mrs. Samsa, who obtained more respect from the charwoman than the others. "Oh," said the charwoman, giggling so amiably that she could not at once continue, "just this, you don't need to bother about how to get rid of the thing next door. It's been seen to already." Mrs. Samsa and Grete bent over their letters again, as if preoccupied; Mr. Samsa, who perceived that she was eager to begin describing it all in detail, stopped her with a decisive hand. But since she was not allowed to tell her story, she remembered the great hurry she was in, being obviously deeply huffed: "Bye, everybody," she said, whirling off violently, and departed.

"She'll be given notice tonight," said Mr. Samsa, but neither from his wife nor his daughter did he get any answer, for the charwoman seemed to have shattered again the composure they had barely achieved. They rose, went to the window and stayed there, clasping each other tight. Mr. Samsa turned in his chair to look at them and quietly observed them for a little. Then he called out: "Come along, now, do. Let bygones be bygones. And you might have some consideration for me." The two of them complied at once, hastened to him, caressed him and quickly finished their letters.

Then they all three left the apartment together, which was more than they had done for months, and went by tram into the open country outside the town. The tram, in which they were the only passengers, was filled with warm sunshine. Leaning comfortably back in their seats they canvassed their prospects for the future, and it appeared on closer inspection that these were not at all bad, for the jobs they had got, which so far they had never really discussed with each other, were all three admirable and likely to lead to better things later on. The greatest immediate improvement in their condition would of course arise from moving to another house; they wanted to take a smaller and cheaper but also better situated and more easily run apartment than the one they had, which Gregor had selected. While they were thus conversing, it struck both Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, almost at the same moment, as they became aware of their daughter's increasing vivacity, that in spite of all the sorrow of recent times, which had made her cheeks pale, she had bloomed into a pretty girl with a good figure. They grew quieter and half unconsciously exchanged glances of complete agreement, having come to the conclusion that it would soon be time to find a good husband for her. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their journey their daughter sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body. ■ ■ ■

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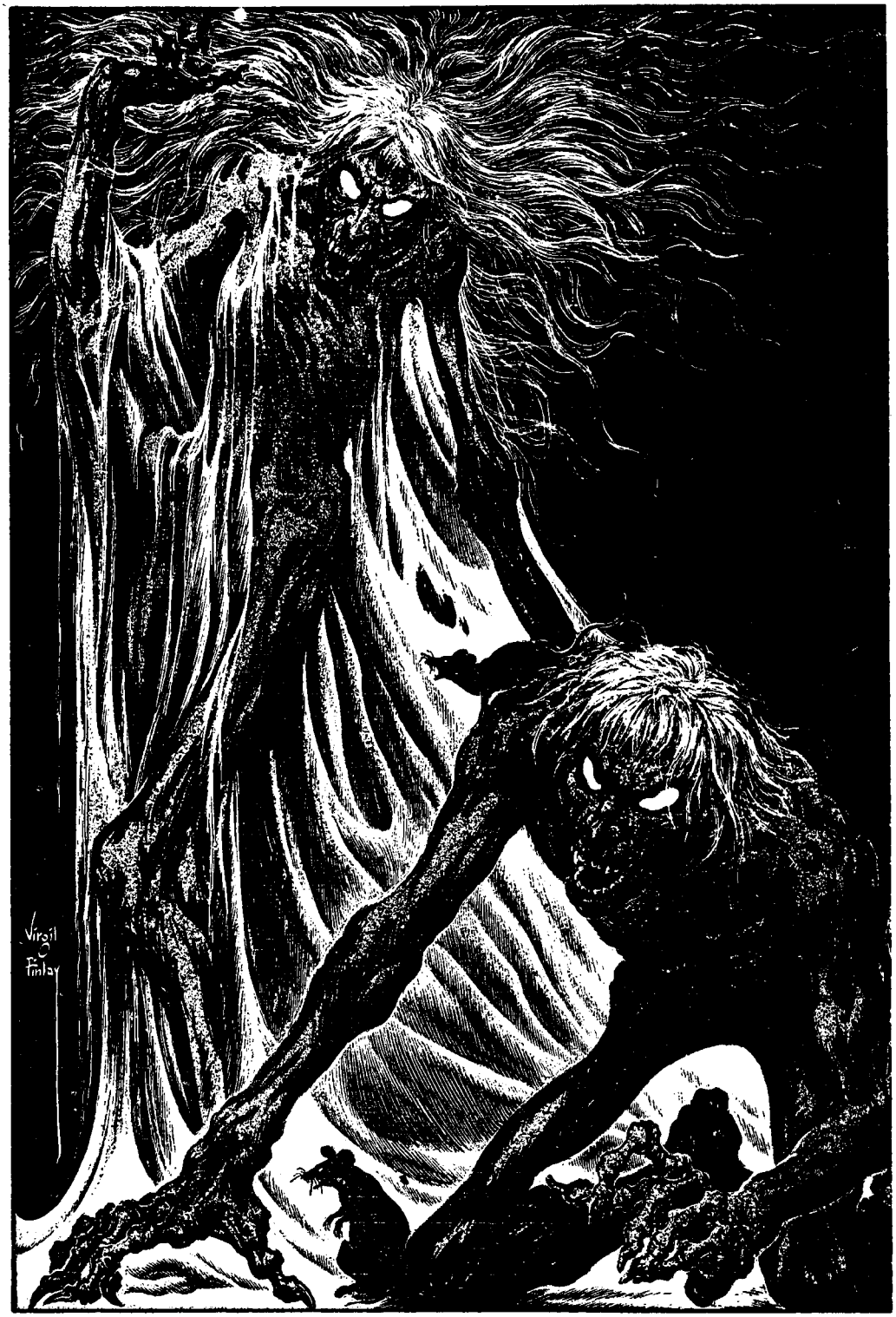

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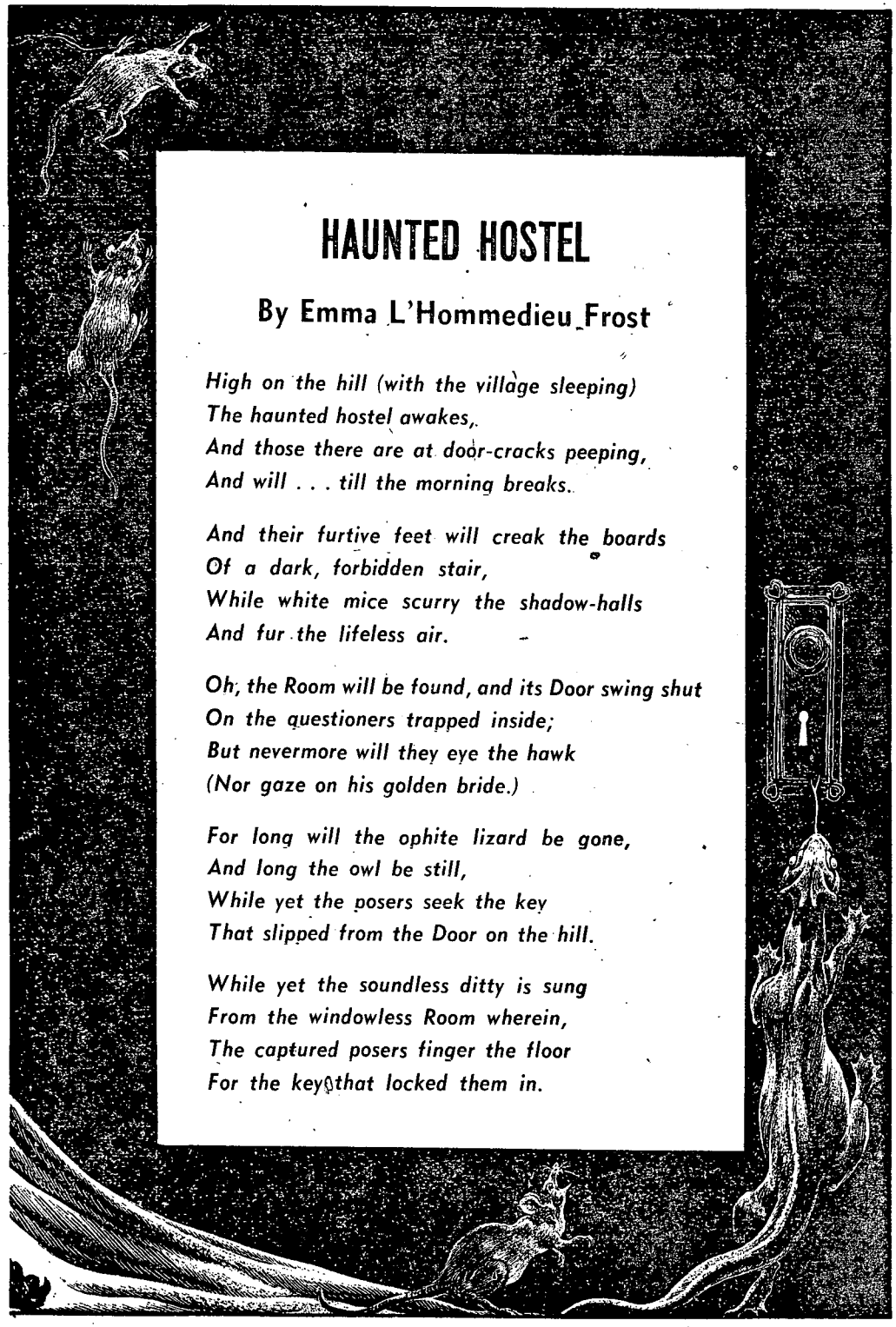

HAUNTED HOSTEL

By Emma L'Hommedieu Frost

High on the hill (with the village sleeping)
The haunted hostel awakes,
And those there are at door-cracks peeping,
And will . . . till the morning breaks.

And their furtive feet will creak the boards
Of a dark, forbidden stair,
While white mice scurry the shadow-halls
And fur the lifeless air.

Oh, the Room will be found, and its Door swing shut
On the questioners trapped inside;
But nevermore will they eye the hawk
(Nor gaze on his golden bride.)

For long will the ophite lizard be gone,
And long the owl be still,
While yet the posers seek the key
That slipped from the Door on the hill.

While yet the soundless ditty is sung
From the windowless Room wherein,
The captured posers finger the floor
For the key that locked them in.

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WORMS OF THE EARTH

Terrible was the power of Rome . . . but Titus Sulla played fox to a dangerous eagle when he baited the highland king whose fens bred magic more deadly than the bite of Caesar's swords. . . .

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By Robert E. Howard

A hurried babel of tongues arose . and the shadows heaved in turmoil.

"STRIKE in the nails, soldiers, and let our guest see the reality of our good Roman justice!"

The speaker wrapped his purple cloak closer about his powerful frame and settled back into his official chair, much as he might have settled back in his seat at the Circus Maximus to enjoy the clash of gladiatorial swords. Realization of power colored his every move. Whetted pride was necessary to Roman satisfaction, and Titus Sulla was justly proud; for he was military governor of Ebbracum and answerable only to the emperor of Rome. He was a strongly built man of medium height, with the hawk-like features of the pure-bred Roman. Now a mocking smile curved his full lips, in-

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creasing the arrogance of his haughty aspect. Distinctly military in appearance, he wore the golden-scaled corselet and chased breastplate of his rank, with the short stabbing sword at his belt, and he held on his knee the silvered helmet with its plumed crest. Behind him stood a clump of impassive soldiers with shield and spear—blond titans from the Rhineland.

Before him was taking place the scene which apparently gave him so much gratification—a scene common enough wherever stretched the far-flung boundaries of Rome. A rude cross lay flat upon the barren earth and on it was bound a man—half naked, wild of aspect with his corded limbs, glaring eyes and shock of tangled hair. His executioners were Roman soldiers, and with heavy hammers they prepared to pin the victim's hands and feet to the wood with iron spikes.

Only a small group of men watched this ghastly scene, in the dread place of execution beyond the city walls: the governor and his watchful guards; a few young Roman officers; the man to whom Sulla had referred as "guest" and who stood like a bronze image, unspeaking. Beside the gleaming splendor of the Roman, the quiet garb of this man seemed drab, almost somber.

He was dark, but did not resemble the Latins around him. There was about him none of the warm, almost Oriental sensuality of the Mediterranean which colored their features. The blond barbarians behind Sulla's chair were less unlike the man in facial outline than were the Romans. Not his were the full curving red lips, nor the rich waving locks suggestive of the Greek. Nor was his complexion the rich olive of the south; rather it was the bleak darkness of the north. The whole aspect of the man vaguely suggested the shadowed mists, the gloom, the cold and the icy winds of the naked northern lands. Even his black eyes were savagely cold, like black fires burning through fathoms of ice.

His height was only medium but there was something about him which transcended mere physical bulk—a certain fierce innate vitality, comparable only to that of a wolf or a panther. In every line of his supple, compact body, as well as in his coarse straight hair and thin lips, this was evident—in the hawk-like set of the head on the corded neck, in the broad square shoulders, in the deep chest, the lean loins, the narrow feet. Built with the savage economy of a panther, he was an image of dynamic potentialities, pent in with iron self-control.

At his feet crouched one like him in complexion—but there the resemblance ended. This other was a stunted giant, with gnarly limbs, thick body, a low sloping brow and an expression of dull ferocity, now clearly mixed with fear. If the man on the cross resembled, in a tribal way, the man Titus Sulla called guest, he far more resembled the stunted crouching giant.

"Well, Partha Mac Othna," said the governor with studied effrontery, "when you return to your tribe, you will have a tale to tell of the justice of Rome, who rules the south."

"I will have a tale," answered the other in a voice which betrayed no emotion, just as his dark face, schooled to immobility, showed no evidence of the maelstrom in his soul.

"Justice to all under the rule of Rome," said Sulla. "Pax Romana! Reward for virtue, punishment for wrong!" He laughed inwardly at his own black hypocrisy, then continued: "You see, emissary of Pictland, how swiftly Rome punishes the transgressor."

"I see," answered the Pict in a voice which strongly curbed anger made deep with menace, "that the subject of a foreign king is dealt with as though he were a Roman slave."

"He has been tried and condemned in an unbiased court," retorted Sulla.

"Aye! And the accuser was a Roman, the witnesses Romans, and judge Roman! He committed murder? In a moment of fury he struck down a Roman merchant who cheated, tricked and robbed him, and to injury added insult—aye, and a blow! Is his king but a dog, that Rome crucifies his subjects at will, condemned by Roman courts? Is his king too weak or foolish to do justice, were he informed and formal charges brought against the offender?"

"Well," said Sulla cynically, "you may inform Bran Mak Morn yourself. Rome, my friend, makes no account of her actions to barbarian kings. When savages come among us, let them act with discretion or suffer the consequences."

The Pict shut his iron jaws with a snap that told Sulla further badgering would elicit no reply. The Roman made a gesture to the executioners. One of them seized a spike and placing it against the thick wrist of the victim, smote heavily. The iron point sank deep through the flesh, crunching against the bones. The lips of the man on the cross writhed, though no moan escaped him. As a trapped wolf fights against his cage, the bound victim instinctively wrenched and struggled. The veins swelled in his temples, sweat beaded his low forehead, the muscles in arms and legs writhed and knotted. The hammers fell in inexorable strokes, driving the cruel points deeper and deeper, through wrists and ankles; blood flowed in a black river over the hands that held the spikes, staining the wood of the cross, and the splintering of bones was dis-

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tinctly heard. Yet the sufferer made no outcry, though his blackened lips writhed back until the gums were visible, and his shaggy head jerked involuntarily from side to side.

The man called Partha Mac Othna stood like an iron image, eyes burning from an inscrutable face, his whole body hard as iron from the tension of his control. At his feet crouched his misshapen servant, hiding his face from the grim sight, his arms locked about his master's knees. Those arms gripped like steel and under his breath the fellow mumbled ceaselessly as if in invocation.

The last stroke fell; the cords were cut from arm and leg, so that the man would hang supported by the nails alone. He had ceased his struggling that only twisted the spikes in his agonizing wounds. His bright black eyes, unglazed, had not left the face of the man called Partha Mac Othna; in them lingered a desperate shadow of hope. Now the soldiers lifted the cross and set the end of it in the hole prepared, stamped the dirt about it to hold it erect. The Pict hung in midair, suspended by the nails in his flesh, but still no sound escaped his lips. His eyes still hung on the somber face of the emissary, but the shadow of hope was fading.

"He'll live for days," said Sulla cheerfully. "These Picts are harder than cats to kill; I'll keep a guard of ten soldiers watching night and day to see that no one takes him down before he dies. Ho, there, Valerius, in honor of our esteemed neighbor, King Bran Mak Morn; give him a cup of wine!"

With a laugh the young officer came forward, holding a brimming wine-cup and, rising on his toes, lifted it to the parched lips of the sufferer. In the black eyes flared a red wave of unquenchable hatred; writhing his head aside to avoid even touching the cup, he spat full into the young Roman's eyes. With a curse Valerius dashed the cup to the ground, and before any could halt him, wrenched out his sword and sheathed it in the man's body.

Sulla rose with an imperious exclamation of anger; the man called Partha Mac Othna had started violently, but he bit his lip and said nothing. Valerius seemed somewhat surprised at him, as he sullenly cleansed his sword. The act had been instinctive, following the insult to Roman pride, the one thing unbearable.

"Give up your sword, young sir!" exclaimed Sulla. "Centurian Publius, place him under arrest. A few days in a cell with stale bread and water will teach you to curb your patrician pride, in matters dealing with the will of the empire. What, you young fool, do you not realize that you could not have made the dog a more kindly gift? Who would not rather desire a quick death on the sword than the slow agony on the cross? Take him away. And you, centurion, see that the guards remain at the cross so that the body is not cut down until the ravens pick bare the bones. Partha Mac Othna, I go to a banquet at the house of Demetrius—will you not accompany me?"

Chapter Two

THE emissary shook his head, his eyes fixed on the limp form which sagged on the black-stained cross. He made no reply. Sulla smiled sardonically, then rose and strode away, followed by his secretary who bore the gilded chair ceremoniously, and by the stolid soldiers, with whom walked Valerius, head sunken.

The man called Partha Mac Othna flung a wide fold of his cloak about his shoulders, halted a moment to gaze at the grim cross with its burden, darkly etched against the crimson sky, where the clouds of night were gathering. Then he stalked away, followed by his silent servant.

In an inner chamber of Ebbracum, the man called Partha Mac Othna paced tigerishly to and fro. His sandalled feet made no sound on the marble tiles.

"Grom!" He turned to the gnarled servant. "Well I know why you held my knees so tightly—why you muttered aid of the Moon-Woman—you feared I would lose my self-control and make a mad attempt to succor that poor wretch. By the gods, I believe that was what that dog Roman wished—his iron-cased watchdogs watched me narrowly, I know, and his baiting was harder to bear than ordinarily.

"Gods black and white, dark and light!" He shook his clenched fists above his head in the black gust of his passion. "That I should stand by and see a man of mine butchered on a Roman cross—without justice and with no more trial than that farce! Black gods of R'lyeh, even you would I invoke to the ruin and destruction of those butchers! I swear by the Nameless Ones, men shall die howling for that deed, and Rome shall cry out as a woman in the dark who treads upon an adder!"

"He knew you, master," said Grom.

The other dropped his head and covered his eyes with a gesture of savage pain.

"His eyes will haunt me when I lie dying. Aye, he knew me, and almost until the last, I read in his eyes the hope that I might aid him. Gods and devils, is Rome to butcher my people beneath my very eyes? Then I am not king but dog!"

"Not so loud, in the name of all the gods!" exclaimed Grom in affright. "Did these Romans suspect you were Bran Mak Morn, they

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would nail you on a cross beside that other."

"They will know it ere long," grimly answered the king. "Too long I have lingered here in the guise of an emissary, spying upon mine enemies. They have thought to play with me, these Romans, masking their contempt and scorn only under polished satire. Rome is courteous to barbarian ambassadors, they give us fine houses to live in, offer us slaves, pander to our pleasure with women and gold and wine and games, but all the while they laugh at us; their very courtesy is an insult, and sometimes—as today—their contempt discards all veneer. Bah! I've seen through their baitings—have remained imperturbably serene and swallowed their studied insults. But this—by the fiends of Hell, this is beyond human endurance! My people look to me; if I fail them—if I fail even one—even the lowest of my people, who will aid them? To whom shall they turn? By the gods, I'll answer the gibes of these Roman dogs with black shaft and trenchant steel!"

"And the chief with the plumes?" Grom meant the governor and his gutturals thrummed with the blood-lust. "He dies?" He flicked out a length of steel.

Bran scowled. "Easier said than done. He dies—but how may I reach him? By day his German guards keep at his back; by night they stand at door and window. He has many enemies, Romans as well as barbarians. Many a Briton would gladly slit his throat."

Grom seized Bran's garment, stammering as fierce eagerness broke the bonds of his inarticulate nature.

"Let me go, master! My life is worth nothing. I will cut him down in the midst of his warriors!"

Bran smiled fiercely and clapped his hand on the stunted giant's shoulder with a force that would have felled a lesser man.

"Nay, old war-dog, I have too much need of thee! You shall not throw your life away uselessly. Sulla would read the intent in your eyes. Besides, the javelins of his Teutons would be through you ere you could reach him. Not by dagger in the dark will we strike this Roman, not by the venom in the cup nor the shaft from the ambush."

The king turned and paced the floor a moment, his head bent in thought. Slowly his eyes grew murky with a thought so fearful he did not speak it aloud to the waiting warrior.

"I have become somewhat familiar with the maze of Roman politics during my stay in this accursed waste of mud and marble," said he.

"During a war on the Wall, Titus Sulla, as governor of this province, is supposed to hasten thither with his centurions. But this Sulla does not do; he is no coward, but the bravest avoid certain things—to each man, however bold, his own particular fear. So he sends in his place Caius Camillus, who in times of peace patrols the fens of the west, lest the Britons break over the border. And Sulla takes his place in the Tower of Trajan. Ha!"

He whirled and gripped Grom with steely fingers.

"Grom, take the red stallion and ride north! Let no grass grow under the stallion's hoofs! Ride to Cormac na Connacht and tell him to sweep the frontier with sword and torch! Let his wild Gaels feast their fill of slaughter. After a time I will be with him. But for a time I have affairs in the west."

Grom's black eyes gleamed and he made a passionate gesture with his crooked hand—an instinctive move of savagery.

Bran drew a heavy bronze seal from beneath his tunic.

"This is my safe-conduct as an emissary to Roman courts," he said grimly. "It will open all gates between this house and Baal-dor. If any official questions you too closely—here!"

Lifting the lid of an iron-bound chest, Bran took out a small, heavy leather bag which he gave into the hands of the warrior.

"When all keys fail at a gate," said he, "try a golden key. Go now!"

There were no ceremonious farewells between the barbarian king and his barbarian vassal. Grom flung up his arm in a gesture of salute; then turning, he hurried out.

Bran stepped to a barred window and gazed out into the moonlit streets.

"Wait until the moon sets," he muttered grimly. "Then I'll take the road to—Hell! But before I go I have a debt to pay."

The stealthy clink of a hoof on the flags reached him.

"With the safe-conduct and gold, not even Rome can hold a Pictish reaver," muttered the king. "Now I'll sleep until the moon sets."

With a snarl at the marble frieze-work and fluted columns, as symbols of Rome, he flung himself down on a couch, from which he had long impatiently torn the cushions and silk stuffs, as too soft for his hard body. Hate and the black passion of vengeance seethed in him, yet he went instantly to sleep. The first lesson he had learned in his bitter hard life was to snatch sleep any time he could, like a wolf that snatches sleep on the hunting trail. Generally his slumber was as light and dreamless as a panther's, but tonight it was otherwise.

He sank into fleecy gray fathoms of slumber and in a timeless, misty realm of shadows he met the tall, lean, white-bearded figure of old Gonar, the priest of the Moon, high counsellor to the king. And Bran stood aghast, for Gon-

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ar's face was as white as driven snow and he shook as with ague. Well might Bran stand appalled, for in all the years of his life he had never before seen Gonar the Wise show any sign of fear.

"What now, old one?" asked the king. "Goes all well in Baal-dor?"

"All is well in Baal-dor where my body lies sleeping," answered old Gonar. "Across the void I have come to battle with you for your soul. King, are you mad, this thought you have thought in your brain?"

"Gonar," answered Bran somberly, "this day I stood still and watched a man of mine die on the cross of Rome. What his name or his rank, I do not know. I do not care. He might have been a faithful unknown warrior of mine, he might have been an outlaw. I only know that he was mine; the first scents he knew were the scents of the heather; the first light he saw was the sunrise on the Pictish hills. He belonged to me, not to Rome. If punishment was just, then none but I should have dealt it. If he were to be tried, none but I should have been his judge. The same blood in our veins; the same fire maddened our brains; in infancy we listened to the same old tales, and in youth we sang the same old songs. He was bound to my heart-strings, as every man and every woman and every child of Pictland is bound. It was mine to protect him; now it is mine to avenge him."

"But in the name of the gods, Bran," expostulated the wizard, "take your vengeance in another way! Return to the heather—mass your warriors—join with Cormac and his Gaels, and spread a sea of blood and flame the length of the great wall!"

"All that I will do," grimly answered Bran. "But now—*now*— I will have vengeance such as no Roman ever dreamed of! Ha, what do they know of the mysteries of this ancient isle, which sheltered strange life long before Rome rose from the marshes of the Tiber?"

"Bran, there are weapons too foul to use, even against Rome!"

Bran barked short and sharp as a jackal.

"Ha! There are no weapons I would not use against Rome! My back is at the wall. By the blood of the fiends, has Rome fought me fair? Bah! I am a barbarian king with a wolfskin mantle and an iron crown, fighting with my handful of bows and broken pikes against the queen of the world. What have I? The heather hills, the wattle huts, the spears of my shock-headed tribesmen! And I fight Rone—with her armored legions, her broad fertile plains and rich seas—her mountains and her rivers and her gleaming cities—her wealth, her steel, her gold, her mastery and her wrath. By steel and fire I will fight her—and by subtlety and treachery—by the thorn in the foot, the adder in the path, the venom in the cup, the dagger in the dark; aye," his voice sank somberly, "and by the worms of the earth!"

"But it is madness!" cried Gonar. "You will perish in the attempt you plan—you will go down to Hell and you will not return! What of your people then?"

"If I can not serve them I had better die," growled the king.

"But you can not even reach the beings you seek," cried Gonar. "For untold centuries they have dwelt *apart*. There is no door by which you can come to them. Long ago they severed the bonds that bound them to the world we know."

"Long ago," answered Bran somberly, "you told me that nothing in the universe was separated from the stream of Life—a saying the truth of which I have often seen evident. No race, no form of life but is close-knit somehow, by some manner, to the rest of Life and the world. Somewhere there is a thin link connecting *those* I seek to the world I know. Somewhere there is a Door. And somewhere among the bleak fens of the west I will find it."

Stark horror flooded Gonar's eyes and he gave back crying, "Wo! Wo! Wo! Wo! to Pictdom! Wo to the unborn kingdom! Wo, black wo to the sons of men! Wo, wo, wo, wo!"

Bran awoke to a shadowed room and the starlight on the window-bars. The moon had sunk from sight though its glow was still faint above the house tops. Memory of his dream shook him and he swore beneath his breath.

Rising, he flung off cloak and mantle, donning a light shirt of black mesh-mail, and girding on sword and dirk. Going again to the iron-bound chest he lifted several compact bags and emptied the clinking contents into the leathern pouch of his girdle. Then wrapping his wide cloak about him, he silently left the house. No servants there were to spy on him—he had impatiently refused the offer of slaves which it was Rome's policy to furnish her barbarian emissaries. Gnarled Grom had attended to all Bran's simple needs.

The stables fronted on the courtyard. A moment's groping in the dark and he placed his hand over a great stallion's nose, checking the nicker of recognition. Working without a light he swiftly bridled and saddled the great brute, and went through the courtyard into a shadowy side-street, leading him. The moon was setting, the border of floating shadows widening along the western wall. Silence lay on the marble palaces and mud hovels of Ebbracum under the cold stars.

Bran touched the pouch at his girdle, which was heavy with minted gold that bore the

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stamp of Rome. He had come to Ebbracum posing as an emissary of Pictdom, to act the spy. But being a barbarian, he had not been able to play his part in aloof formality and sedate dignity. He retained a crowded memory of wild feasts where wine flowed in fountains; of white-bosomed Roman women, who, sated with civilized lovers, looked with something more than favor on a virile barbarian; of gladiatorial games; and of other games where dice clicked and spun and tall stacks of gold changed hands. He had drunk deeply and gambled recklessly, after the manner of barbarians, and he had had a remarkable run of luck, due possibly to the indifference with which he won or lost. Gold to the Pict was so much dust, flowing through his fingers. In his land there was no need of it. But he had learned its power in the boundaries of civilization.

Almost under the shadow of the northwestern wall he saw ahead of him loom the great watch-tower which was connected with and reared above the outer wall. One corner of the castle-like fortress, farthest from the wall, served as a dungeon. Bran left his horse standing in a dark alley, with the reins hanging on the ground, and stole like a prowling wolf into the shadows of the fortress.

The young officer Valerius was awakened from a light, unquiet sleep by a stealthy sound at the barred window. He sat up, cursing softly under his breath as the faint starlight which etched the window-bars fell across the bare stone floor and reminded him of his disgrace. Well, in a few days, he ruminated, he'd be well out of it; Sulla would not be too harsh on a man with such high connections; then let any man or woman gibe at him! Damn that insolent Pict! But wait, he thought suddenly, remembering: what of the sound which had roused him?

"Hssssst!" It was a voice from the window. Why so much secrecy? It could hardly be a foe—yet, why should it be a friend? Valerius rose and crossed his cell, coming close to the window. Outside all was dim in the starlight and he made out but a shadowy form close to the window.

"Who are you?" He leaned close against the bars, straining his eyes into the gloom.

His answer was a snarl of wolfish laughter, a long flicker of steel in the starlight. Valerius reeled away from the window and crashed to the floor, clutching his throat, gurgling horribly as he tried to scream. Blood gushed through his fingers, forming about his twitching body a pool that reflected the dim starlight dully and redly.

Outside Bran glided away like a shadow, without pausing to peer into the cell. In another minute the guards would round the corner on their regular routine. Even now he hear the measured tramp of their iron-clad feet. Before they came in sight he had vanished and they clumped stolidly by the cell-windows with no intimation of the corpse that lay on the floor within.

Bran rode to the small gate in the western wall, unchallenged by the sleepy watch. What fear of foreign invasion in Ebbracum?—and certain well organized thieves and women-stealers made it profitable for the watchmen not to be too vigilant. But the single guardsman at the western gate—his fellows lay drunk in a nearby tavern—lifted his spear and bawled for Bran to halt and give an account of himself. Silently the Pict reined closer. Masked in the dark cloak, he seemed dim and indistinct to the Roman, who was only aware of the glitter of his cold eyes in the gloom. But Bran held up his hand against the starlight and the soldier caught the gleam of gold; in the other hand he saw a long sheen of steel. The soldier understood, and he did not hesitate between the choice of a golden bribe or a battle to the death with this unknown rider who apparently was a barbarian of some sort. With a grunt he lowered his spear and swung the gate open. Bran rode through, casting a handful of coins to the Roman. They fell about his feet in a golden shower, clinking against the flags. He bent in greedy haste to retrieve them and Bran Mak Morn rode westward like a flying ghost in the night.

Into the dim fens of the west came Bran Mak Morn. A cold wind breathed across the gloomy waste and against the gray sky a few herons flapped heavily. The long reeds and marsh-grass waved in broken undulations and out across the desolation of the wastes a few still meres reflected the dull light. Here and there rose curiously regular hillocks above the general levels, and gaunt against the somber sky Bran saw a marching line of upright monoliths—menhirs, reared by what nameless hands?

A faint blue line to the west lay the foothills that beyond the horizon grew to the wild mountains of Wales where dwelt still wild Celtic tribes—fierce blue-eyed men that knew not the yoke of Rome. A row of well-garrisoned watchtowers held them in check. Even now, far away across the moors, Bran glimpsed the unassailable keep men called the Tower of Trajan.

These barren wastes seemed the dreary accomplishment of desolation, yet human life was not utterly lacking. Bran met the silent men of the fen, reticent, dark of eye and hair; speaking a strange mixed tongue whose long-blended elements had forgotten their pristine separated sources. Bran recognized a certain

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kinship in these people to himself, but he looked on them with the scorn of a pure-blooded patrician for men of mixed strains.

Not that the common people of Caledonia were altogether pure-blooded; they got their stocky bodies and massive limbs from a primitive Teutonic race which had found its way into the northern tip of the isle even before the Celtic conquest of Britain was completed, and had been absorbed by the Picts. But the chiefs of Bran's folk had kept their blood from foreign taint since the beginnings of time, and he himself was a pure-bred Pict of the Old Race. But these fenmen, overrun repeatedly by British, Gaelic and Roman conquerors, had assimilated blood of each, and in the process almost forgotten their original language and lineage.

For Bran came of a race that was very old, which had spread over western Europe in one vast Dark Empire, before the coming of the Aryans, when the ancestors of the Celts, the Hellenes and the Germans were one primal people, before the days of tribal splitting-off and westward drift.

Only in Caledonia, Bran brooded, had his people resisted the flood of Aryan conquest. He had heard of a Pictish people called Basques, who in the crags of the Pyrenees called themselves an unconquered race; but he knew that they had paid tribute for centuries to the ancestors of the Gaels, before these Celtic conquerors abandoned their mountain-realm and set sail for Ireland. Only the Picts of Caledonia had remained free, and they had been scattered into small feuding tribes—he was the first acknowledged king in five hundred years—the beginning of a new dynasty under a new name. In the very teeth of Rome he dreamed his dreams of empire.

He wandered through the fens, seeking a Door. Of his quest he said nothing to the dark-eyed fenmen. They told him news that drifted from mouth to mouth—a tale of war in the north, the skirl of war-pipes along the winding Wall, of gathering-fires in the heather, of flame and smoke and rapine and the glutting of Gaelic swords in the crimson sea of slaughter. The eagles of the legions were moving northward and the ancient road resounded to the measured tramp of the iron-clad feet. And Bran, in the fens of the west, laughed, well pleased.

In Ebbracum Titus Sulla gave secret word to seek out the Pictish emissary with the Gaelic name who had been under suspicion, and who had vanished the night young Valerius was found dead in his cell with his throat ripped out. Sulla felt that this sudden bursting flame of war on the Wall was connected closely with his execution of a condemned Pictish criminal, and he set his spy system to work, though he felt sure that Partha Mac Othna was by this time far beyond his reach. He prepared to march from Ebbracum, but he did not accompany the considerable force of legionaries which he sent north.

Sulla was a brave man, but each man has his own dread, and Sulla's was Cormac na Connacht, the black-haired prince of the Gaels, who had sworn to cut out the governor's heart and eat it raw. So Sulla rode with his ever-present bodyguard, westward, where lay the Tower of Trajan with its war-like commander, Caius Camillus, who enjoyed nothing more than taking his superior's place when the red waves of war washed at the foot of the Wall. Devious politics, but the legate of Rome seldom visited this far isle, and what with his wealth and intrigues, Titus Sulla was the highest power in Britain.

And Bran, knowing all this, patiently waited his coming, in the deserted hut in which he had taken up his abode.

One gray evening he strode on foot across the moors, a stark figure, blackly etched against the dim crimson fire of the sunset. He felt the incredible antiquity of the slumbering land, as he walked like the last man on the day after the end of the world. Yet at last he saw a token of human life—a drab hut of wattle and mud, set in the reedy breast of the fen.

A woman greeted him from the open door and Bran's somber eyes narrowed with a dark suspicion. The woman was not old, yet the evil wisdom of ages was in her eyes; her garments were ragged and scanty, her black locks tangled and unkempt, lending her an aspect of wildness well in keeping with her grim surroundings. Her red lips laughed but there was no mirth in her laughter, only a hint of mockery, and under the lips her teeth showed sharp and pointed like fangs.

"Enter, master," said she, "if you do not fear to share the roof of the witch-woman of Dagon-moor!"

Bran entered silently and sat himself down on a broken bench while the woman busied herself with the scanty meal cooking over an open fire on the squalid hearth. He studied her lithe, almost serpentine motions, the ears which were almost pointed, the yellow eyes which slanted curiously.

"What do you seek in the fens, my lord?" she asked, turning toward him with a supple twist of her whole body.

"I seek a Door," he answered, chin resting on his fist. "I have a song to sing to the worms of the earth!"

She started upright, a jar falling from her hands to shatter on the hearth.

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"This is an ill saying, even spoken in chance," she stammered.

"I speak not by chance but by intent," he answered.

She shook her head. "I know not what you mean."

"Well you know," he returned. "Aye, you know well! My race is very old—they reigned in Britain before the nations of the Celts and the Hellenes were born out of the womb of peoples. But my people were not first in Britain. By the mottles on your skin, by the slanting of your eyes, by the taint in your veins, I speak with full knowledge and meaning."

A while she stood silent, her lips smiling but her face inscrutable.

"Man, are you mad?" she asked, "that in your madness you come seeking that from which strong men fled screaming in old times?"

"I seek a vengeance," he answered, "that can be accomplished by Them I seek."

"You have listened to a bird singing; you have dreamed empty dreams."

"I have heard a viper hiss," he growled, "and I do not dream. Enough of this weaving of words. I came seeking a link between two worlds; I have found it."

"I need lie to you no more, man of the North," answered the woman. "They you seek still dwell beneath the sleeping hills. They have drawn *apart*, farther and farther from the world you know."

"But they still steal forth in the night to grip women straying on the moors," said he, his gaze on her slanted eyes.

She laughed wickedly.

"What would you of me?"

"That you bring me to Them."

She flung back her head with a scornful laugh. His left hand locked like iron in the breast of her scanty garment and his right closed on his hilt. She laughed in his face.

"Strike and be damned, my northern wolf! Do you think that such life as mine is so sweet that I could cling to it as a babe to the breast?"

His hand fell away.

"You are right. Threats are foolish. I will buy your aid."

"How?" The laughing voice hummed with mockery.

Bran opened his pouch and poured into his cupped palm a stream of gold.

"More wealth than the men of the fen ever dreamed of."

Again she laughed. "What is this rusty metal to me? Save it for some white-breasted Roman woman who will play the traitor for you!"

"Name me a price;" he urged. "The head of an enemy—"

"By the blood in my veins, with its heritage of ancient hate, who is mine enemy but thee?" She laughed, and springing, struck cat-like. But her dagger splintered on the mail beneath his cloak and he flung her off with a loathing flirt of his wrist which tossed her sprawling across her grass-strewn bunk. Lying there she laughed up at him.

"I will name you a price, then, my wolf, and it may be in days to come you will curse the armor that broke Atla's dagger!" She rose and came close to him, her disquietingly long hands fastened fiercely into his cloak. "I will tell you, Black Bran, king of Caledon! Oh, I knew you when you came into my hut with your black hair and your cold eyes! I will lead you to the doors of Hell if you wish—and the price shall be the embrace and the kisses of a king!

"What of my blasted and bitter life, I, whom mortal men loathe and fear? I have not known the love of men, the clasp of a strong arm, the sting of human kisses, I, Atla, the were-woman of the moors! What have I known but the lone winds of the fens, the dreary fire of cold sunsets, the whispering of the marsh grasses?—the faces that blink up at me in the waters of the meres, the foot-pad of night—things in the gloom, the glimmer of red eyes, the grisly murmur of nameless beings in the night!

"I am half-human, at least! Have I not known sorrow and yearning and crying wistfulness, and the drear ache of loneliness? Give to me, king—give me your fierce kisses and your hurtful barbarian's embrace. Then in the long drear years to come I shall not utterly eat out my heart in vain envy of the white-bosomed women of men; for I shall have a memory few of them can boast—the kisses of a king! Then I will guide you to the gates of Hell!"

Bran eyed her somberly; he reached forth and gripped her arm in his iron fingers. An involuntary shudder shook him at the feel of her sleek skin. He nodded slowly and drawing her close to him, forced his head down to meet her lifted lips.

Chapter Three

THE cold gray mists of dawn wrapped King Bran like a clammy cloak. He turned to the woman whose eyes gleamed in the gray gloom.

"Make good your part of the contract," he said roughly. "I sought a link between worlds and in you I found it. I seek the one

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thing sacred to Them. It shall be the Key opening the Door that lies unseen between me and Them. Tell me how I can reach it."

"I will." The red lips smiled terribly. "Go to the mound men call Dagon's Barrow. Draw aside the stone that blocks the entrance and go under the dome of the mound. The floor of the chamber is made of seven great stones, six grouped about the seventh. Lift out the center stone— and you will see!"

"Will I find the Black Stone?" he asked.

"Dagon's Barrow is the Door to the Black Stone," she answered, "if you dare follow the Road."

"Will the symbol be well guarded?" He unconsciously loosened his blade in its sheath.

The red lips curled mockingly.

"If you meet any on the Road you will die as no mortal man has died for long centuries. The Stone is not guarded, as men guard their treasures. Why should They guard what man has never sought? Perhaps They will be near, perhaps not. It is a chance you must take, if you wish the Stone. Beware, king of Pictdom! Remember it was your folk who, so long ago, cut the thread that bound Them to human life. They were almost human then —they overspread the land and knew the sunlight. Now they have drawn *apart*. They know not the sunlight and they shun the light of the moon. Even the starlight they hate. Far, far apart have they drawn, who might have been men in time, but for the spears of your ancestors."

The sky was overcast with misty gray, through which the sun shone coldly yellow when Bran came to Dagon's Barrow, a round hillock overgrown with rank grass of a curious fungoid appearance. On the eastern side of the mound showed the entrance of a crudely built stone tunnel which evidently penetrated the barrow. One great stone blocked the entrance to the tomb. Bran laid hold of the sharp edges and exerted all his strength. It held fast. He drew his sword and worked the blade between the blocking stone and the sill. Using the sword as a lever, he worked carefully, and managed to loosen the great stone and wrench it out. A foul charnel-house scent flowed out of the aperture and the dim sunlight seemed less to illuminate the cavern-like opening than to be fouled by the rank darkness which clung there.

Sword in hand, ready for he knew not what, Bran groped his way into the tunnel, which was long and narrow, built up of heavy joined stones, and was too low for him to stand erect. Either his eyes became somewhat accustomed to the gloom, or the darkness was, after all, somewhat lightened by the sunlight filtering in through the entrance. At any rate he came into a round low chamber and was able to make out its general dome-like outline. Here, no doubt, in old times, had reposed the bones of him for whom the stones of the tomb had been joined and the earth heaped high above them; but now of those bones no vestige remained on the stone floor. And bending close and straining his eyes, Bran made out the strange, startlingly regular pattern of that floor: six well-cut slabs clustered about a seventh, six-sided stone.

He drove his sword-point into a crack and pried carefully. The edge of the central stone tilted slightly upward. A little work and he lifted it out and leaned against the curving wall. Straining his eyes downward he saw only the gaping blackness of a dark well, with small, worn steps that led downward and out of sight. He did not hesitate. Though the skin between his shoulders crawled curiously, he swung himself into the abyss and felt the clinging blackness swallow him.

Groping downward, he felt his feet slip and stumble on steps too small for human feet. With one hand pressed hard against the side of the well he steadied himself, fearing a fall into unknown and unlighted depths. The steps were cut into solid rock, yet they were greatly worn away. The farther he progressed, the less like steps they became, mere bumps of worn stone. Then the direction of the shaft changed sharply. It still led down, but at a shallow slant down which he could walk, elbows braced against the hollowed sides, head bent low beneath the curved roof. The steps had ceased altogether and the stone felt slimy to the touch, like a serpent's lair. What beings, Bran wondered, had slithered up and down this slanting shaft, for how many centuries?

The tunnel narrowed until Bran found it rather difficult to shove through. He lay on his back and pushed himself along with his hands, feet first. Still he knew he was sinking deeper and deeper into the very guts of the earth; how far below the surface he was, he dared not contemplate. Then ahead a faint witch-fire gleam tinged the abysmal blackness. He grinned savagely and without mirth. If They he sought came suddenly upon him, how could he fight in that narrow shaft? But he had put the thought of personal fear behind him when he began this hellish quest. He crawled on, thoughtless of all else but his goal.

And he came at last into a vast space where he could stand upright. He could not see the roof of the place, but he got an impression of dizzying vastness. The blackness pressed in on all sides and behind him he could see the entrance to the shaft from which he had just emerged—a black well in the darkness. But in

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front of him a strange grisly radiance glowed about a grim altar built of human skulls. The source of that light he could not determine, but on the altar lay a sullen night-black object—the Black Stone!

Bran wasted no time in giving thanks that the guardians of the grim relic were nowhere near. He caught up the Stone, and gripping it under his left arm, crawled into the shaft. When a man turns his back on peril its clammy menace looms more grisly than when he advances upon it. So Bran, crawling back up the nighted shaft with his grisly prize, felt the darkness turn on him and slink behind him, grinning with dripping fangs. Clammy sweat beaded his flesh and he hastened to the best of his ability, ears strained for some stealthy sound to betray that fell shapes were at his heels. Strong shudders shook him, despite himself, and the short hair on his neck prickled as if a cold wind blew at his back.

When he reached the first of the tiny steps he felt as if he had attained to the outer boundaries of the mortal world. Up them he went, stumbling and slipping, and with a deep gasp of relief, came out into the tomb, whose spectral grayness seemed like the blaze of noon in comparison to the stygian depths he had just traversed. He replaced the central stone and strode into the light of the outer day, and never was the cold yellow light of the sun more grateful as it dispelled the shadows of black-winged nightmares of fear and madness that seemed to have ridden him up out of the black deeps. He shoved the great blocking stone back into place, and picking up the cloak he had left at the mouth of the tomb, he wrapped it about the Black Stone and hurried away, a strong revulsion and loathing shaking his soul and lending wings to his strides.

A gray silence brooded over the land. It was desolate as the blind side of the moon, yet Bran felt the potentialities of life—under his feet, in the brown earth—sleeping, but how soon to waken, and in what horrific fashion?

He came through the tall masking reeds to the still deep men called Dagon's Mere. No slightest ripple ruffled the cold blue water to give evidence of the grisly monster legend said dwelt beneath. Bran closely scanned the breathless landscape. He saw no hint of life, human or unhuman. He sought the instincts of his savage soul to know if any unseen eyes fixed their lethal gaze upon him, and found no response. He was alone as if he were the last man alive on earth.

Swiftly he unwrapped the Black Stone, and as it lay in his hands like a solid sullen block of darkness, he did not seek to learn the secret of its material nor scan the cryptic characters carved thereon. Weighing it in his hands and calculating the distance, he flung it far out, so that it fell almost exactly in the middle of the lake. A sullen splash and the waters closed over it. There was a moment of shimmering flashes on the bosom of the lake; then the blue surface stretched placid and unrippled again.

Chapter Four

THE were-woman turned swiftly as Bran approached her door. Her slant eyes widened.

"You! And alive! And sane!"

"I have been into Hell and I have returned," he growled. "What is more, I have that which I sought."

"The Black Stone?" she cried. "You really dared steal it? Where is it?"

"No matter; but last night my stallion screamed in his stall and I heard something crunch beneath his thundering hoofs which was not the wall of the stable—and there was blood on his hoofs when I came to see, and blood on the floor of the stall. And I have heard stealthy sounds in the night, and noises beneath my dirt floor, as if worms burrowed deep in the earth. They know I have stolen their Stone. Have you betrayed me?"

She shook her head.

"I keep your secret; they do not need my word to know you. The farther they have retreated from the world of men, the greater have grown their powers in other uncanny ways. Some dawn your hut will stand empty and if men dare investigate they will find nothing—except crumbling bits of earth on the dirt floor."

Bran smiled terribly.

"I have not planned and toiled thus far to fall prey to the talons of vermin. If They strike me down in the night, They will never know what became of their idol—or whatever it be to Them. I would speak with Them."

"Dare you come with me and meet them in the night?" she asked.

"Thunder of all gods!" he snarled. "Who are you to ask me if I dare? Lead me to Them and let me bargain for a vengeance this night. The hour of retribution draws nigh. This day I saw silvered helmets and bright shields gleam across the fens—the new commander has arrived at the Tower of Trajan and Caius Camillus has marched to the Wall."

That night the king went across the dark desolation of the moors with the silent were-woman. The night was thick and still as if the land lay in ancient slumber. The stars blinked vaguely, mere points of red struggling through the unbreathing gloom. Their gleam was dimmer than the glitter in the eyes of the woman

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who glided beside the king. Strange thoughts shook Bran, vague, titanic, primeval. Tonight ancestral linkings with these slumbering fens stirred in his soul and troubled him with the fantasmal, eon-veiled shapes of monstrous dreams. The vast age of his race was borne upon him; where now he walked an outlaw and an alien, dark-eyed kings in whose mold he was cast, had reigned in old times. The Celtic and Roman invaders were as strangers to his ancient isle beside his people. Yet his race likewise had been invaders, and there was an older race than his—a race whose beginnings lay lost and hidden back beyond the dark oblivion of antiquity.

Ahead of them loomed a low range of hills, which formed the easternmost extremity of those straying chains which far away climbed at last to the mountains of Wales. The woman led the way up what might have been a sheep-path, and halted before a wide black gaping cave.

"A door to those you seek, oh king!" Her laughter rang hateful in the gloom. "Dare ye enter?"

His fingers closed in her tangled locks and he shook her viciously.

"Ask me but once more if I dare," he grated, "and your head and shoulders part company! Lead on."

Her laughter was like sweet deadly venom. They passed into the cave and Bran struck flint and steel. The flicker of the tinder showed him a wide dusty cavern, on the roof of which hung clusters of bats. Lighting a torch, he lifted it and scanned the shadowy recesses, seeing nothing but dust and emptiness.

"Where are They?" he growled.

She beckoned him to the back of the cave and leaned against the rough wall, as if casually. But the king's keen eyes caught the motion of her hand pressing hard against a projecting ledge. He recoiled as a round black well gaped suddenly at his feet. Again her laughter slashed him like a keen silver knife. He held the torch to the opening and again saw small worn steps leading down.

"They do not need those steps," said Atla. "Once they did, before your people drove them into the darkness. But you will need them."

She thrust the torch into a niche above the well; it shed a faint red light into the darkness below. She gestured into the well and Bran loosened his sword and stepped into the shaft. As he went down into the mystery of the darkness, the light was blotted out above him, and he thought for an instant Atla had covered the opening again. Then he realized that she was descending after him.

The descent was not a long one. Abruptly Bran felt his feet on a solid floor. Atla swung down beside him and stood in the dim circle of light that drifted down the shaft. Bran could not see the limits of the place into which he had come.

"Many caves in these hills," said Atla, her voice sounding small and strangely brittle in the vastness, "are but doors to the greater caves which lie beneath."

AND now Bran was aware of movement in the gloom. The darkness was filled with stealthy noises not like those made by any human foot. Abruptly sparks began to flash and float in the blackness, like flickering fireflies. Closer they came until they girdled him in a wide half-moon. And beyond the ring gleamed other sparks, a solid sea of them, fading away in the gloom until the farthest were mere tiny pin-points of light. And Bran knew they were the slanted eyes of the beings who had come upon him in such numbers that his brain reeled at the contemplation—and at the vastness of the cavern.

Now that he faced his ancient foes, Bran knew no fear. He felt the waves of terrible menace emanating from them, the grisly hate, the inhuman threat to body, mind and soul. More than a member of a less ancient race, he realized the horror of his position, but he did not fear.

"They know you have the Stone, oh king," said Atla, and though he knew she feared, though he felt her physical efforts to control her trembling limbs, there was no quiver of fright in her voice. "You are in deadly peril; they know your breed of old—oh, they remember the days when their ancestors were men! I can not save you; both of us will die as no human has died for ten centuries. Speak to them, if you will; they can understand your speech, though you do not understand theirs."

Bran laughed and the closing ring of fire shrank back at the savagery in his laughter. Drawing his sword with a soul-chilling rasp of steel, he set his back against what he hoped was a solid stone wall. Facing the glittering eyes with his sword gripped in his right hand and his dirk in his left, he laughed.

"Aye," he growled, "I am a Pict, a son of those warriors who drove your brutish ancestors before them like chaff before the storm!—who flooded the land with your blood and heaped high your skulls for a sacrifice to the Moon-Woman! You who fled of old before my race, dare ye now snarl at your master? Roll on me like a flood, now, if ye dare! Before your viper fangs drink my life I will reap your multitudes like ripened barley—of your severed heads will I build a tower and of your mangled corpses will I rear up a wall! Dogs of the dark, vermin of Hell, worms of the earth, rush in

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and try my steel! When Death finds me in this dark cavern, your living will howl for the scores of your dead and your Black Stone will be lost to you forever—for only I know where it is hidden and not all the tortures of all the hells can wring the secret from my lips!"

Then followed a tense silence; Bran faced the fire-lit darkness, tensed like a wolf at bay, waiting the charge; at his side the woman cowered, her eyes ablaze. Then from the silent ring that hovered beyond the dim torchlight rose a vague abhorrent murmur. Bran, prepared as he was for anything, started. Gods, was that the speech of creatures which had once been called men?

Atla straightened, listening intently. From her lips came the same hideous soft sibilances, and Bran, though he had already known the grisly secret of her being, knew that never again could he touch her save with loathing.

She turned to him, a strange smile curving her red lips dimly in the ghostly light.

"They fear you, oh king! By the black secrets of R'lyeh, who are you that Hell itself quails before you? Not your steel, but the stark ferocity of your soul has driven unused fear into their strange minds. They will buy back the Black Stone at any price."

"Good." Bran sheathed his weapons. "They shall promise not to molest you because of your aid of me. And," his voice hummed like the purr of a hunting tiger, "they shall deliver into my hands Titus Sulla, governor of Ebbracum, now commanding the Tower of Trajan. Do They understand?"

Again rose the low frightful sounds and Bran, who feared not their wrath, shuddered at their voices.

"They understand," said Atla. "Bring the Black Stone to Dagon's Ring tomorrow night when the earth is veiled with blackness that foreruns the dawn. Lay the Stone on the altar. There They will bring Titus Sulla to you. Trust Them; They have not interfered in human affairs for many centuries, but They will keep their word."

Bran nodded, and turning, climbed up the stair with Atla close behind him. At the top he turned and looked down once more. As far as he could see floated a glittering ocean of slanted yellow eyes upturned. But the owners of those eyes kept carefully beyond the dim circle of torchlight and of their bodies he could see nothing. Their low hissing speech floated up to him and he shuddered as his imagination visualized, not a throng of biped creatures, but a swarming swaying myriad of serpents, gazing up at him with their glittering unwinking eyes.

He swung into the upper cave and Atla thrust the blocking stone back in place.

Chapter Five

IT WAS not long before sunset when Bran came again to the reed-grown marge of Dagon's Mere. Casting cloak and sword-belt on the ground, he stripped himself of his short leathern breeches. Then gripping his naked dirk in his teeth, he went into the water with the smooth ease of a diving seal. Swimming strongly, he gained the center of the small lake, and drove himself downward.

The mere was deeper than he had thought. It seemed he would never reach the bottom, and when he did, his groping hands failed to find what he sought. A roaring in his ears warned him and he swam to the surface.

Gulping deep of the refreshing air, he dived again, and again his quest was fruitless. A third time he sought the depth, and this time his groping hands met a familiar object in the silt of the bottom. Grasping it, he swam up to the surface.

The Stone was not particularly bulky, but it was heavy. He swam leisurely, and suddenly was aware of a curious stir in the waters about him which was not caused by his own exertions. Thrusting his face below the surface, he tried to pierce the blue depths with his eyes and thought to see a dim gigantic shadow hovering there.

He swam faster, not frightened, but wary. His feet struck the shallows and he waded up on the shelving shore. Looking back he saw the waters swirl and subside.

Bran donned his garments, mounted the black stallion and rode across the fens in the desolate crimson of the sunset's afterglow, with the Black Stone wrapped in his cloak. He rode, not to his hut, but to the west, in the direction of the Tower of Trajan and the Ring of Dagon. As he covered the miles that lay between, the red stars winked out.

Dagon's Ring lay some distance from the Tower—a sullen circle of tall gaunt stones planted upright, with a rough-hewn stone altar in the center. The Romans looked on these menhirs with aversion; they thought the Druids had reared them; but the Celts supposed Bran's people, the Picts, had planted them—and Bran well knew what hands reared those grim monoliths in lost ages, though for what reasons, he but dimly guessed.

The king did not ride straight to the Ring. He was consumed with curiosity as to how his grim allies intended carrying out their promise. That They could snatch Titus Sulla from the very midst of his men, he felt sure, and he believed he knew how They would do it. He felt the gnawings of a strange misgiving, as if he had tampered with powers of un-

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known breadth and depth, and had loosed forces which he could not control.

Each time he remembered that reptilian murmur, those slanted eyes of the night before, a cold breath passed over him. They had been abhorrent enough when his people drove Them into the caverns under the hills, ages ago; what had long centuries of retrogression made of them? In their nighted, subterranean life, had They retained any of the attributes of humanity at all?

Some instinct prompted him to ride toward the Tower. He knew he was near; but for the thick darkness he could have plainly seen its stark outline tusking the horizon. Even now he should be able to make it out dimly. An obscure, shuddersome premonition shook him and he spurred the stallion into swift canter.

And suddenly Bran staggered in his saddle as from a physical impact, so stunning was the surprise of what met his gaze. The impregnable Tower of Trajan was no more! Bran's astounded gaze rested on a gigantic pile of ruins—of shattered stone and crumbled granite, from which jutted the jagged and splintered ends of broken beams. At one corner of the tumbled heap one tower rose out of the waste of crumpled masonry, and it leaned drunkenly as if its foundations had been half cut away.

BRAN dismounted and walked forward, dazed by bewilderment. The moat was filled in places by fallen stones and broken pieces of mortared wall. He crossed over and came among the ruins. Where, he knew, only a few hours before the flags had resounded to the martial tramp of iron-clad feet, and the walls had echoed to the clang of shields and the blast of the loud-throated trumpets, an horrific silence reigned.

Almost under Bran's feet, a broken shape writhed and groaned. The king bent down to the legionary who lay in a sticky red pool of his own blood. A single glance showed the Pict that the man, horribly crushed and shattered, was dying.

Lifting the bloody head, Bran placed his flask to the pulped lips and the Roman instinctively drank deep, gulping through spintered teeth. In the dim starlight Bran saw his glazed eyes roll.

"The walls fell," muttered the dying man. "They crashed down like the skies falling on the day of doom. Ah Jove, the skies rained shards of granite and hailstones of marble!"

"I have felt no earthquake shock," Bran scowled, puzzled.

"It was no earthquake," muttered the Roman. "Before last dawn it began, the faint dim scratching and clawing far below the earth. We of the guard heard it—like rats burrowing, or like worms hollowing out the earth. Titus laughed at us, but all day long we heard it. Then at midnight the Tower quivered and seemed to settle—as if the foundations were being dug away—"

A shudder shook Bran Mak Morn. The worms of the earth! Thousands of vermin digging like moles far below the castle, burrowing away the foundations—gods, the land must be honeycombed with tunnels and caverns—these creatures were even less human than he had thought—what ghastly shapes of darkness had he invoked to his aid?

"What of Titus Sulla?" he asked, again holding the flask to the legionary's lips; in that moment the dying Roman seemed to him almost like a brother.

"Even as the Tower shuddered we heard a fearful scream from the governor's chamber," muttered the soldier. "We rushed there—as we broke down the door we heard his shrieks —they seemed to recede—*into the bowels of the earth!* We rushed in; the chamber was empty. His bloodstained sword lay on the floor; in the stone flags of the floor a black hole gaped. Then — the — towers — reeled — the — roof — broke; — through — a — storm — of — crashing — walls — I — crawled —"

A strong convulsion shook the broken figure.

"Lay me down, friend," whispered the Roman. "I die."

He had ceased to breathe before Bran could comply. The Pict rose, mechanically cleansing his hands. He hastened from the spot, and as he galloped over the darkened fens, the weight of the accursed Black Stone under his cloak was as the weight of a foul nightmare on a mortal breast.

As he approached the Ring, he saw an eery glow within, so that the gaunt stone stood etched like the ribs of a skeleton in which a witch-fire burns. The stallion snorted and reared as Bra tied him to one of the menhirs. Carrying the Stone he strode into the grisly circle and sa Atla standing beside the altar, one hand on her hip, her sinuous body swaying in a serpe tine manner. The altar glowed all over with ghastly light and Bran knew some one, pro bably Atla, had rubbed it with phosphorus fr m some dank swamp or quagmire.

He strode forward, and whipping his cloak from about the Stone, flung the accursed thing on to the altar.

"I have fulfilled my part of the contract," he growled.

"And They, theirs," she retorted. "Look! They come!"

(Continued on page 111)

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FIND THE HAPPY CHILDREN

By Benjamin Ferris

Were the boxes that promised the world to each one who looked in them, really traps to destroy it?

THE first of them showed up on the shore of a sunny cove on the coast of Sweden. A six-year-old boy was playing there, and as his tanned legs carried him down after a receding wave, he came across the dark object.

Glistening on the damp sand, it was about a foot square, perfectly smooth, and solid black.

The boy stared. He dropped to his knees. His restless little fingers reached out, then drew slowly back. He smiled. Dreamily, he began to rock back and forth. . . .

An hour later his mother, her calls unanswered, came down to the cove. Puzzled and alarmed, she hurried to her son. He heeded neither her voice nor the touch of her hand. The mother's distracted eyes went to the featureless block which apparently had hypnotized him. The alarm faded from her face. She sighed and sank to the sand. A radiant smile broke over her face, and she forgot all about her son. . . .

* * *

The Lengua Indian called out as he approached his village in the Chaco. There was no response. He shifted the carcass of the swamp deer to his other naked shoulder and called again. The deep tones died away into silence. Where was the tribe? Was there not even a young one to rush out and exclaim at his skill in the hunt?

Then he saw them. Men, women and children, they sat on the bare ground, completely attentive to something he could not see. He called again, anxiety making his deep voice rough. There was no sign that they had heard.

The Lengua let the deer slide to the ground. Cautiously, primitive instincts pumping him full of alarm, he approached the group. He felt something alien, something wrong. But his people looked as relaxed and happy as though they'd had a *chicha* party.

He stepped closer. He looked over their heads. At the sight of the odd black shape on the ground, fear drained from his face. He sank to his haunches with the others. His dark features softened, and he smiled. . . .

* * *

Walter Swanson lived on the bluff above Madre del Mar's famous beach. His front windows made a perfect frame for the blue of the Pacific Ocean. As he sat talking over the telephone, his gaze roved idly over the view.

In the middle of a sentence, he broke off. He was silent so long the receiver made irritated sounds.

"Something washed up on the beach," he explained. "Everybody's running over to look."

There was another long silence.

"Well?"

"I don't know," Swanson said. "They're acting kind of funny."

"Look, I'm busy. Call me back when you've got your mind on business again."

"O.K." And Swanson dropped the receiver.

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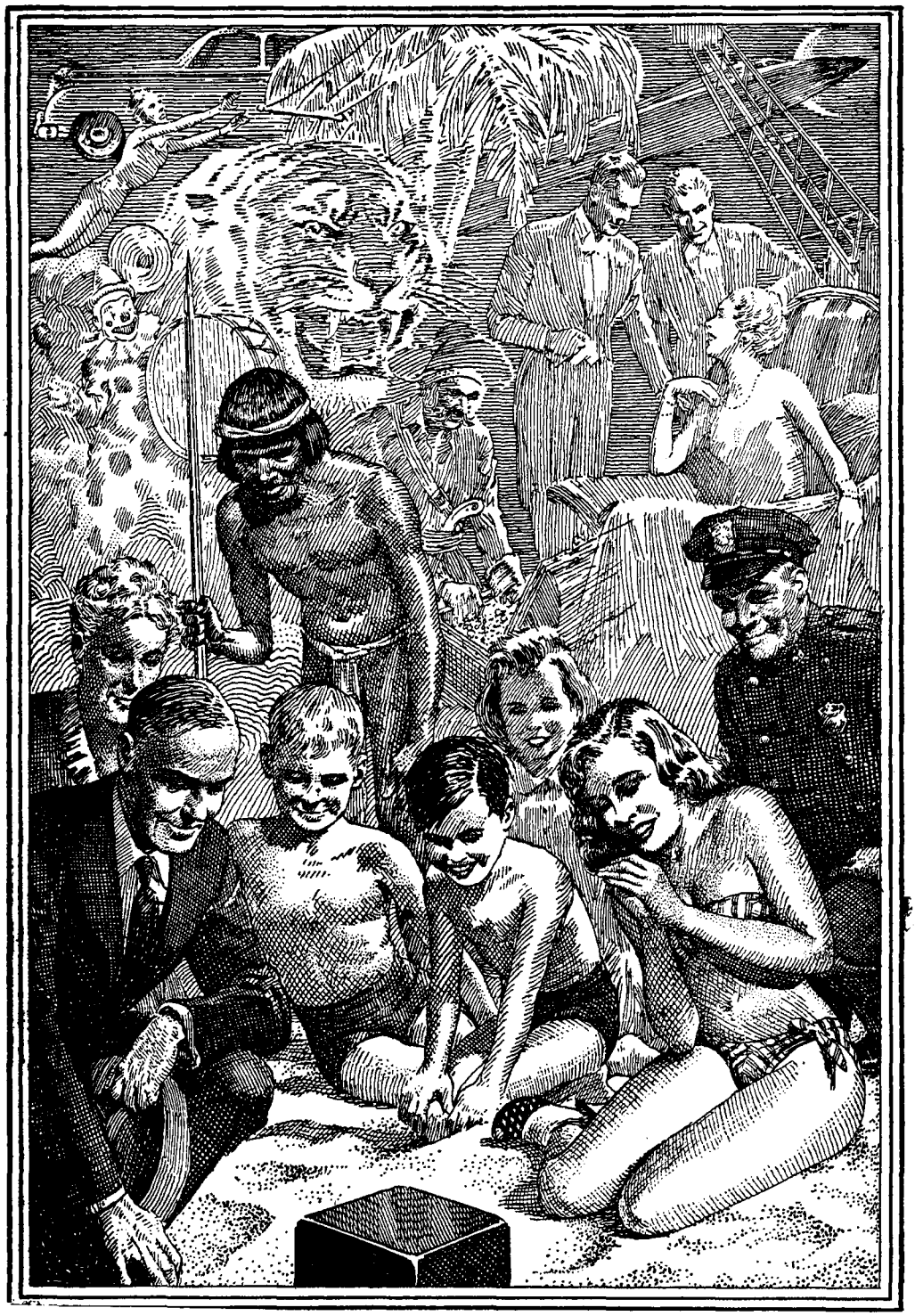

They were literally glued to the spot. . . .

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The man on the other end of the connection hung up with a bang. Then, muttering, he turned to other business. About two hours later a friend from a nearby office looked in on him.

"Henry, want to come down to the beach with me?"

The man looked at him blankly.

"Haven't you heard? Some kind of little black boxes are coming in on the tide."

Then Henry remembered that Walter Swanson had never called him back. Uneasiness twitched at him. He reached for his hat. . . .

* * *

Edward Evans worked in the Western States office of the World Combine news syndicate. He learned of the strange objects from a transcript of a news broadcast from the Madre del Mar radio station, which he had picked up from Jeanne Waltham's desk while waiting for her to finish a telephone call.

Jeanne stopped talking and smiled up at him. She was a brown-haired, bright-eyed girl who ran a column of oddities in the news, which was why this particular transcript had been routed to her.

Ed didn't smile back.

"O.K.," Jeanne said. "Be a sourpuss. I think that item's fresh and heartwarming. Half of the town chucking everything and trooping down to the beach just to satisfy their curiosity."

"I don't like it, somehow." He chewed his lip. "These things been reported from anywhere else?"

Jeanne shook her head.

"Description?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders—a gesture that deserved a lot more attention than Ed gave it. "Tell you later. After I call Madre del Mar."

A boy touched Ed's elbow. "Rewrite wants you."

Jeanne's eyes lingered on his tall figure as he walked off. One of the Combine's top roving correspondents, he had worked on features all over the world. Jeanne liked to explain that her interest was purely professional. But she knew better.

Ed was back at his own desk when Jeanne came up and handed over another radio transcript. "I couldn't raise anyone when I called. Then this came along."

That the Madre del Mar announcer had been excited was apparent even through the impersonal typed copy:

"Folks, all I can say is, nothing like this has ever hit our city before. Everyone who can walk—and I mean that literally—is down at the beach. Streets are deserted. Stores and schools are empty. My studio engineer just walked out.

"Whatever it is, down there, it must be terrific. I can't locate a single person who has come back. So I can't give you a first hand description. Awhile ago we rigged up a portable broadcasting unit and the boys went down with it. But I haven't heard a peep from them.

"I don't mind telling you, folks, that the suspense is killing me. Don't know how much longer I can stick it out here."

As Ed finished reading, Jeanne handed him another item—a few inches off the network tape:

"The forty inhabitants of the tiny lumbering town of Sarsag, Washington, have found an unusual new diversion, according to a prospector who flew his plane over the community this afternoon. The entire population, from babes to grandmothers, was sitting in the street around a small black box. They were so absorbed in this object that they didn't even look up when the plane buzzed the street."

Ed frowned at the paper.

Jeanne said, "A fluke of some kind. Coincidence. After all, there's got to be a reasonable explanation."

Ed nodded. "Think I'll go to Madre del Mar and look at one of those things for myself."

Jeanne said nothing, but the appeal in her eyes was plain.

Ed shook his head. "Nix. You know how the boss is about trips. Especially for girls. Besides," he added as he started away, "I don't like the sound of this."

A FEW minutes later, a turbo-cruiser took off from the noisy roof-port. Jeanne sat very still, not quite able to believe that the boss had said she could go. Ed must have gone to bat for her, and she wasn't quite able to believe that, either. She pressed his arm and murmured, "Thanks."

Ed grunted. He was engrossed in two new reports, one from South Australia and the other from Belgium.

Jeanne smiled to herself and snuggled happily into the seat, turning to watch the mountains flashing by the port. It seemed no time at all till the cruiser swooshed across California's central valley, curved over the coastal foothills, and came down in a long glide to the Madre del Mar airport. A portion of the long white strand was visible below the bluff, and they looked in silence at the dark clusters spaced along it.

The pilot set the cruiser down, then turned to them with a grin. "What's the matter with

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this place? Not a person in sight anywhere."

Ed's glance ranged over the deserted airport. "Can you keep busy while we go downtown?"

The pilot yawned. "Maybe not busy. But happy."

Jeanne and Ed walked across the apron. He steered her toward the parking area. "We'll borrow a car, in the name of the Combine."

They picked a small one, an early Atomcar. Ed used the adjustor key that a friend in the Security Police had given him, and soon they were gliding swiftly through Madre del Mar's residential area. Watching the lifeless blocks, Jeanne felt the first cold touch of premonition. She glanced at Ed's grim profile and tightened her hands.

The city hung suspended and unreal, chopped off in the middle of a busy day. Cars perched on grease racks, mowers were stopped halfway through lawns, busses were stranded between corners. The avenues leading to the beach were choked with parked cars. Ed maneuvered his way to the drive that overlooked the ocean, and they stopped.

Without speaking, their steps echoing loudly, they crossed to the bluff. Then the salt wind was pushing at them, and Madre del Mar's famous beach was spread out below.

Jeanne caught her breath. Ed's hand closed on her arm. Thousands of people were sitting or kneeling on the sand below. Young people, oldsters, babies. Some were in bathing suits, most were in street clothes. There were police uniforms, mechanic's overalls, the white of barber's coats.

They formed several huge groups spaced along the sand. In the center of each group, ten feet or so away from the ring of people, was a small, black object. And from the whole vast crowd came not a single whisper of sound.

A seagull sailed by, turning its head to look at them. The surf, at low tide, murmured listlessly. And below them was Madre del Mar's population, caught, fascinated, held suspended by the mysterious dark cubes.

Jeanne trembled. "I can't stand this, Ed. I think I want to scream."

"Go ahead. I don't think they'd notice."

Jeanne bit her lip, and fought to control her trembling.

"I never saw people who looked so happy," Ed said. "Look at their faces."

She didn't answer. Some change in her manner made him look at her sharply. Her eyes were strange, not focused. She was breathing rapidly and shallowly.

Abruptly, she said, "Let's go down there."

"No."

"I want to get closer, Ed." She took hold of his arm. "You wanted to see what those things were. How can you if we don't go down? Please, Ed, I've got to go down there."

Ed shook his head.

Jeanne's eyes turned wild. She arched her supple body against his, begging. "Ed, I'll give you anything you want, if you'll only let me go down."

"No!" His strong hands pinned her.

Her voice went shrill. She was like a child in a tantrum, out of control, out of reason. *"I've got to go down there!"*

Ed set his teeth and by main force pulled her away from the bluff. She screamed, swore, pleaded. She kicked and struggled, bit and clawed like a wildcat.

Thirty yards away from the bluff, Jeanne's resistance ceased. Her panting changed to dry sobs. Her eyes became normal again. She looked confused and embarrassed. Ed guided her to a bench on the parkway.

"You can let go now," she said shakily.

THEY sat in silence for a few moments.

"I'm sorry, Ed. Something was pulling at me. Something I couldn't resist."

"I know. I felt it, too. I never wanted anything more in my life."

"All my troubles and disappointments were gone. I felt nothing but happiness, forever and ever."

"Do you remember the expressions on all those people's faces?"

"But how can it *be?*" Jeanne cried distractedly.

"I don't know. But they've been down there for hours. They haven't moved. They haven't spoken. They're caught."

Jeanne looked out over the blue of the sea. "But how," she repeated numbly, "could the little black boxes do it?"

Ed shrugged. "Right now, we've got bigger worries. How long will they keep their hold? What if those people sit there without food or water for a week?"

Jeanne put her face in her hands. "Ed, I simply can't believe this thing."

"Let's get moving. We've got to call the boss and the Security Police."

Their car moved swiftly through the eerie silence, once they had threaded their way out of the jam near the bluff. Jeanne saw one pale, fretful face at a window—an invalid, consumed with curiosity, but safe from the spell on the beach.

In the newspaper office, copy lay half-written in typewriters. The network tape, clicking busily away, had built itself into a curly mountain. Ed strode to the telecom switchboard and key-punched a call to the Western States headquarters. Reaching Moxie, he gave a pithy description of the situation at Madre del Mar.

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In his oddly soft and gentle voice, Moxie said, "Thanks. That fills out the picture for me. I've got more reports here, from all over the world. So far, it's still being treated as a gag. I've had several calls from the Security Police. Madre del Mar sounds like the biggest development so far." He paused. "Done any speculating on this thing, Ed?"

"A little." Ed paused, then slowly went on. "This may sound crazy, because you haven't experienced this as we have. But this thing simply can't be explained by any standards that exist in our world today. I'm beginning to think we're being invaded by something from outside the earth."

Moxie sighed, said nothing.

After a long pause, Ed went on. "It's not going to be easy to counteract. Since there's no apparent danger, how can people be kept away from those things? The only ones who could really spread the word are caught before they can. And they don't mind. God, Moxie, you ought to see their faces!"

"I've talked to Washington, Ed. Didn't quite get laughed at."

"Go back with what I've told you. And try to get the Security boys out here. I promise you it will convince them."

"Got a call into them now. Some of the network boys tried a remote control telecast of one of those black things on the East Coast. It didn't work. The thing wouldn't register visually. Maybe it was just as well—might have hypnotised people right in their homes."

"We'll be watching for the Security men, Moxie. Meantime, Jeanne and I will see what else we can learn."

"Keep your chin up."

Ed nodded and switched off the connection.

"Surely," Jeanne said, "the scientists can analyse these things."

"Maybe. But how would you get a scientist close enough without his forgetting what he came to do?"

"But nothing's ever been invented that can't be broken down!"

"Jeanne, didn't you hear what I said to Moxie? I don't think men invented these things." Ed put his arm around her shoulders. "We have to face it."

Jeanne shook her head unwillingly. Then suddenly they were in each other's arms, in a way that had nothing to do with sex at all, but was a yearning, desperate hunger to cling to another warm and familiar human being. . . .

THE Security jet showed up in an incredibly short time, its humped and gleaming blackness streaking through the late afternoon sky. Throbbing, it circled Madre del Mar, then slowed to hover over the downtown section. The pilot selected a broad street and lowered the heavy craft gently to the pavement.

Ed and Jeanne met the crew as they emerged. The leader wore four gold stripes on his shoulder. His tanned face quirked in a brief smile.

"Hello, Harbison," Ed said. "This is Jeanne Waltham, of the Combine staff."

Harbison nodded a greeting. "I heard a tape of your report to Moxie, and we had a view of the beach coming in. Now we want a closer look."

The crew had wheeled a skimmer from a large cargo hold. Its broad rotor blades began to whisper.

"You taking it up?" Ed asked.

Harbison shook his head. "Wish I could. But one of the penalties of command is staying behind to direct. I'm sending three men, wearing impervium suits, with an electronically operated grapple. While they're snagging one of those blocks, we'll set up an observation post on the bluff, and erect a shielded room where we can observe without contact."

"What developed about warning people in other places?"

"In the works. We've got our emergency information boys on it. And our Washington office is starting the job of convincing the government that a hell of an emergency exists."

A command car had followed the skimmer onto the pavement. It was already loaded with equipment, and a half dozen competent-looking young specialists were waiting to take off.

"Coming?" Harbison asked.

Ed glanced at Jeanne. She shook her head. "I don't want to go close like that again. I'll stay back here."

Ed hesitated. Her sincerity was obvious. But they were dealing with something that took small notice of human will power. "Then do you mind if we put a personnel detector on you? If you run into trouble, we'll know it in time to help you."

Jeanne gave him a wan smile. "Whatever you want to do is all right. I just don't want to get . . . close again."

Harbison nodded, and they set up the beam. Ed watched the black dot on the viewing screen become smaller as the command car glided swiftly toward the bluff. Several times abandoned vehicles blocked their way. The driver brushed them aside with the huge front bumper, or swerved to travel over sidewalks and lawns.

When they reached the bluff they saw the skimmer over the beach, rotors flashing in the sunlight as it drifted downward. Fifty feet

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above the largest cluster of people it halted. Not a head turned upward.

The figures in the skimmer moved around the low-hung cockpit. Then the craft descended, hesitating only about fifteen feet above the sand. Below it, the citizens of Madre del Mar sat motionless and oblivious.

"Too close," Ed said sharply. "Harbison, get them back up!"

But even as Harbison pressed the button on his speaker, the skimmer dropped farther. No grapple emerged from its hull. The men in the cockpit appeared to be staring downward. With a kind of resigned despair, Ed watched the craft settle lower and lower.

Its wheels touched the ground. Then the bulge of its belly pressed down on heads and shoulders. There was no outcry, no scramble to get away. Unbelievably, those people let themselves be crushed by the weight of the machine. Without a sound, their bodies sank or shifted. Dozens of them died. Others were terribly maimed. And still they smiled!

Like puppets, the three Security men stepped out of the skimmer. They sank to the sand. They sat there, absorbed.

A harsh sound came from Harbison's throat. There was sweat standing on his brow. "Evans, do you feel anything strange? Something pulling at you?"

While the others had been busy behind them, yards away from the edge of the bluff, they had been standing right next to the railing. Ed pushed himself away from it with an effort, and nodded. Teeth gritted, he was fighting the influence of the boxes, too. It was the hardest battle he had ever been in. Every cell in his body strained to answer that irresistible pull.

"Just come along to us," it said. "Don't fight, just let yourself go. Drift gently here, and we'll take care of everything. You don't have to struggle ever again. We have the answer for every problem, the balm for every hurt."

It was a warm, tingling promise of utter comfort, utter happiness, that washed away all frustration, all conflict, all worry.

The little boy on the coast of Sweden didn't have to stop his wonderful sand games when his mother called. The Lengua Indian had lost forever the grinding worry of finding game to keep his family fed. George Swanson no longer had to fight the nagging suspicion that he was a failure as a husband and father.

And among the boys on Madre del Mar's beach, each was secure forever in his own secret dream: coral strands, studded with palms, sprinkled with pirates' gold. The whole delicious feel of a circus—music and barkers and animal smells and popcorn and the softness of sawdust underfoot. Of beautiful, satisfying mechanical dreams: cranes and power-shovels and jet motors and sleek speedships.

For the women, drudgery and dullness and bills were gone. Now, at last, was wealth. Glamorous nights at the theater. Handsome men, kind and considerate and appreciative men, always near, for the rest of time.

No wonder they smiled!

BLINDLY, Ed Evans and Harbison grabbed for one another. Straining, grunting, they forced themselves back away from the bluff. Like drunken men, they struggled to the lawn on which the others were erecting the portable laboratory. The men had felt the influence, too. They were restless and uneasy, but they worked doggedly on.

"Now," Harbison panted, "I begin to appreciate what we're up against. No wonder those people are caught. That was a promise of Heaven."

Ed's own voice was hoarse. "It's a kind of influence we can scarcely conceive, let alone measure and counteract. If it goes on for a week, at the most two or three, the balance of humanity will be sitting around dead. An invasion of happiness!"

"Evans, there isn't a man or woman alive who isn't susceptible. We've all got some frustration, some dissatisfaction, some wish for something better. We wouldn't be human if we didn't." Harbison's voice got ragged. "Maybe our very concern over what is happening is only another advantage for those damned things. Because it's a problem they can appear to solve."

Ed nodded. "I've been thinking about that. There must be whole families down there below, each of them getting something different. They're oblivious to one another, to obligations, even to the demands of their own bodies. The longer a want goes unsatisfied, the stronger the hold over them.

"Where are you going to find people who can resist? Wouldn't they have to be perfectly satisfied, perfectly adjusted, perfectly happy?"

One of the men in the Security crew tapped Harbison on the arm. "The shield is finished. Are we going to send out another skimmer?"

Harbison shook his head. Brooding, he preceded Ed to the gray metal structure. Inside, the others were grouped around a lens set up at one of the ports. They looked at their chief, faces alive with unspoken questions.

Harbison said, "You saw what happened to the boys in the skimmer. Don't go close to

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the bluff. Those things have got some kind of power we don't understand."

They nodded. Even from their position away from the bluff, they had felt it. Harbison stepped to the lens and took a long look. Then he shook his head and moved away without comment. Ed bent to the eyepiece. Even at that distance, through the cold, impersonal glass, the pull jumped at him again—warm, throbbing, compelling.

The dark object seemed about a foot square, looking as if made of some tough plastic. It was slightly rounded at the edges. It was completely motionless, yet it had an unmistakable aura of life—a sheen, an invisible, pulsing force. Nothing could have looked less deadly, yet it loomed as a greater menace to the population of earth than any warship or gun.

With an effort Ed pulled his eyes away. He saw that Harbison and his crew were adjusting a squat, ugly gun. "Don't like to do this," the chief said. "It'll be rough on some of those people. But maybe it'll save the others."

They cranked the snout through the open port, training it on the second large group some way down the beach. There was a tense moment, before the atom-gun grunted. Savage, naked power brushed the men in the structure. There was a slamming sound on the beach. A path of roiling cloud and sand cut across the densely packed people.

When the breeze pushed the cloud away, the watching men saw that the dark block was undamaged. Poised in the air above a crater in the sand, it was in the same position it had occupied before the shot. The people who were left, some of them half-buried in sand, gazed at it, enraptured, as though nothing had happened.

Harshly, Harbison said, "That was a direct hit with the most powerful weapon we possess!"

JEANNE wandered through the deserted streets, gripped by an awful loneliness. Never before had she known what it was to miss so achingly the sounds of a normal city. She found herself wanting to shout, to break a window, to do anything to break that suffocating blanket of silence. She even tried to find the building where she had seen the invalid.

On and on she walked, her lips set and her hands clenched. The sound of the atom-gun startled her badly, till she had guessed what it was. She wanted then to turn back toward the bluff. But she still didn't trust herself to. She couldn't forget how completely her self-control had been wiped away; and aside from the chilling fear it brought, she didn't want Ed to see her like that again.

When her wandering took her past the newspaper office, Jeanne decided to go in and see what the network tape was saying. The lonesome tap of her heels speeded up . . . then she heard another sound.

She stopped dead. Her heart began a frantic racing. Slowly, fearfully, she turned her head . . . and saw a little dark-haired girl smiling at her from a cross street a few yards away. The child was about five years old, with a cerise ribbon in her hair that matched her socks.

"Hi," the girl called. She smiled again, delightedly. Then she began to run toward Jeanne.

There was a sudden blur on the pavement between them. Out of it materialized a shape Jeanne had one sick moment to recognize. A black cube, smooth and featureless, but somehow alive and radiant.

Then the warm current reached her, enveloped her, wiped the shock from her face and the tension from her body. Gently the black box called. She sank to the pavement with an expression of ineffable happiness.

She understood it all now. There was no danger, nothing to fear. The black cubes were not here to hurt people, but to help them. They were only trying to erase all the sorrow and trouble in the world. And she and Ed could finally come together—as she had dreamed so often—and stay together till the end of time.

In the workshop on the bluff, the black dot that was Jeanne's detector-shape vanished from the screen. No one noticed.

Harbison was over at the command car, talking on a special circuit directly to Security headquarters in Washington. His crew of technicians was working furiously to rig up a long-range grapple which could be trained on the beach below. Ed Evans sat with his head in his hands, thinking.

Harbison came back to the post. "We finally woke the government up. We've got broadcasts on all frequencies, warning people to stay away from the cubes. The Combine is doing the same through all its facilities. Fourteen observation posts like this in other parts of the country are also looking for ways to handle or neutralize those objects. The Security Network has alerted all local police. Now we're moving."

Ed sighed. "Maybe. You can warn people. But can you blame them for wanting what the boxes have to offer?" He got up and went to the telescopic eyepiece. He brooded at the black cube that held so many of Madre del Mar's people in a deadly embrace.

* * *

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Jeanne came to with a jerk. For a moment she was completely at a loss. What was she doing, sitting here in the street, heedless of the way her skirt had hiked up over her thighs?

Then her gaze centered on the black shape a few feet away. She gasped and ducked, then scrambled frantically to her feet. But the cube wasn't pulling at her.

It wasn't pulling at her.

She gave a startled cry as something touched her sleeve. She turned to see the little girl smiling at her. "Please, won't you talk to me? Tell me why everybody is so funny."

Jeanne almost sobbed with relief. "Of course, dear." She pressed the child's freshness against her, rubbed her cheek hungrily against the friendly, normal, curly little head.

"What's that?"

Jeanne's glance followed the chubby finger to the cube. It looked different, somehow. Its glow, its lifelike aura were gone. Could it be dead?

When Jeanne didn't answer her, the girl stepped forward. "This, I mean."

"Don't!" Jeanne cried in horror. "Don't touch it!"

The child turned, gave a little shrug. "O.K." She came back and took Jeanne's hand. "I'm Susan. What's your name?"

"My name is Jeanne. Would you like to come with me to find somebody I know? I'll bring you back."

"Sure." The child smiled brightly up at her, and they walked away from the lifeless box. After a few yards the girl began to skip. Jeanne, thinking of the strange behavior of the dark block they were leaving behind—of the wonder that it *could* be left behind—scarcely felt the tugs on her arm.

ED'S RESTLESS pacing finally brought his attention to the personnel detector screen. His face went white. He flipped the controls on and off. The detector was working, all right. But the dot that represented Jeanne was gone.

At his startled shout, Harbison hurried over. "Not possible," he said. "She couldn't have gone out of range without the alarm sounding. Anyway, she hasn't had time to get that far." His long fingers poked among the wires and relays. "Nothing wrong here. I don't understand it."

"Forget the equipment. Something's happened to Jeanne."

They had reached the command car when they saw Jeanne and the girl coming up the street. Ed ran on to meet them. He was scarcely aware of the child's, "Hello," so anxious was he to make sure Jeanne was all right.

Susan's attention was immediately drawn by the gleaming outlines of the Security vehicle. She ran to it and looked up at Harbison. "Mister, can I have a ride, please?"

The Security chief stared at her. She was the first normal person he had seen in Madre del Mar. He stuttered a little, saying, "Sure you can, sister. Here, I'll help you up."

Even before Jeanne had finished telling about the cube that had appeared before her and then so surprisingly lost its power, Harbison had motioned them aboard and nodded to the driver. The huge wheels swiftly retraced the way down town. Carefully, the driver inched toward the dark object.

"There's no pull," Ed muttered. "But maybe it's some kind of a trap."

Harbison jumped down. "I'm not sure I believe it either. But maybe we have got ourselves a sample." He waved at the driver. "Get the 'hot' grapple out."

The girl slid down beside him to watch. Her eyes widened when the crane-like apparatus appeared. "What's that?"

"To pick it up with."

She giggled. Then, before they quite realized what she was doing, she had trotted over to the cube. "You don't need anything to pick it up with." Still laughing, she scooped it up in her arms and brought it to them.

Gingerly, Harbison took it from her. It was surprisingly light. The surface was dull and smooth, neither warm nor cold. It was like a dead, empty shell.

Back at the improvised laboratory, it was put into the shielded compartment where it could be worked on without contact.

The child had investigated the laboratory, and lost interest in the delicate adjustments being made to mechanical hands that were to investigate the cube, behind its wall of transparent impervium. She stood on one foot, then the other, humming. Finally she tugged at Ed's sleeve. "What's everybody doing on the beach?"

They looked at one another. What could they tell her?

"They're all so funny," Susan said. "They won't talk to me, or anything."

There was complete silence. Then Ed said, "You went down to the beach?"

"Sure. But nobody would play. Or talk. So I came back."

"You came back?"

"Honey," Harbison said tensely, "were those black things there when you went down?"

"Uh-huh."

Harbison looked at Ed, then back at the girl. "Would you go back down there again, for us?"

"No! You can't—"

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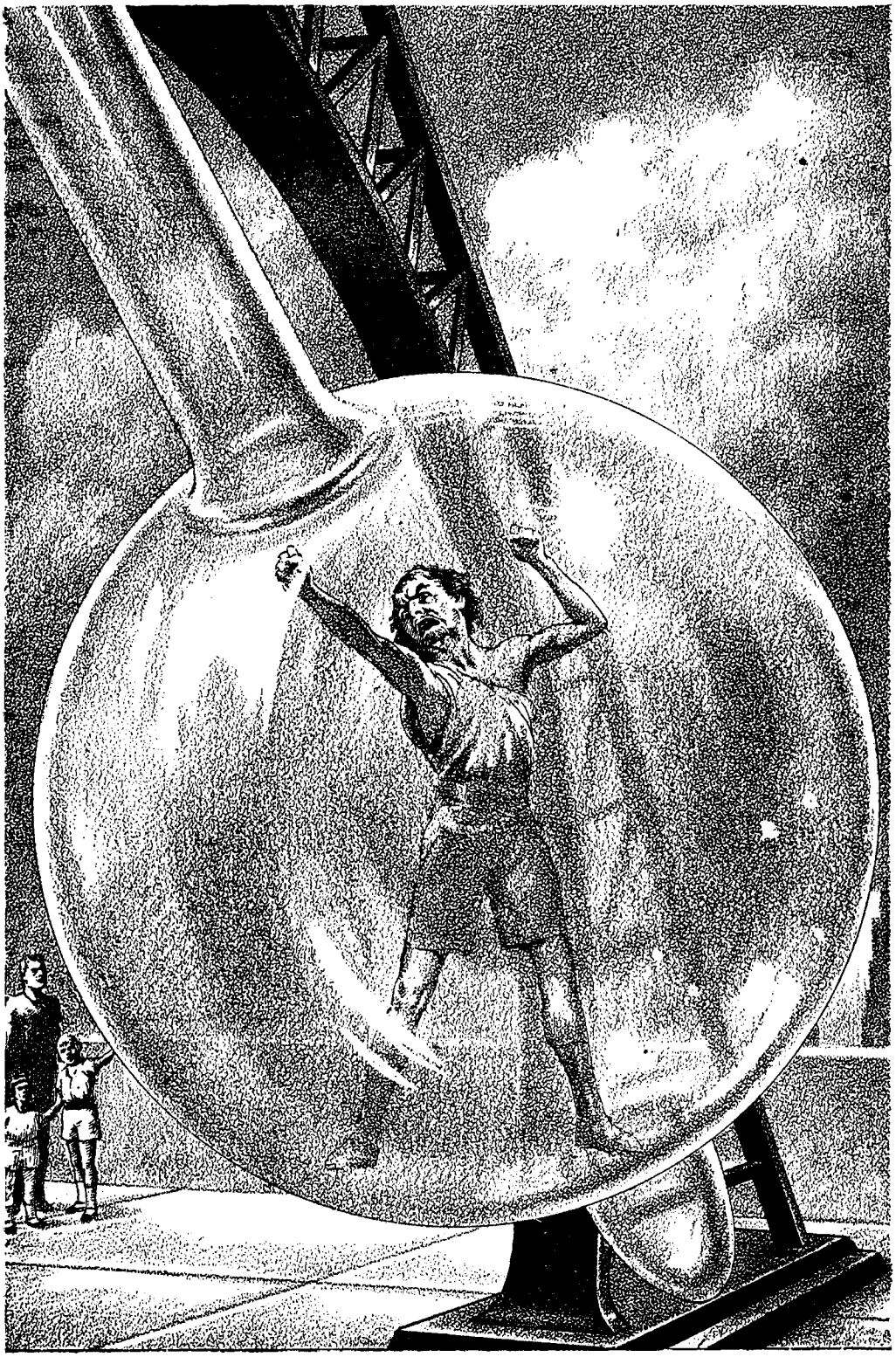

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PENDULUM

Prisoner in Time was he, outlawed from Life and Death alike—the strange, brooding creature who watched the ages roll by and waited half fearfully for—eternity?

By Ray Bradbury and Henry Hasse

"I THINK," shrilled Erjas, "that this is our most intriguing discovery on any of the worlds we have yet visited! It's almost frightening."

His wide, green-shimmering wings fluttered, his beady bird eyes flashed excitement. His several companions bobbed their heads in agreement, the greenish-gold down on their slender necks ruffling softly. They were perched on what had once been a moving sidewalk but was now only a twisted ribbon of wreckage overlooking the vast expanse of a ruined city.

"Yes," Erjas continued, "it's baffling, fantastic! It—it has no reason for being." He pointed unnecessarily to the object of their attention, resting on the high stone plaza a short distance away. "Look at it! Just a huge tubular pendulum hanging from that towering framework! And the machinery, the coggery which must have once sent it swinging . . . I flew up there a while ago to examine it, but it's hoplessly corroded."

"But the head of the pendulum!" another of the bird creatures said awedly. "A hollow

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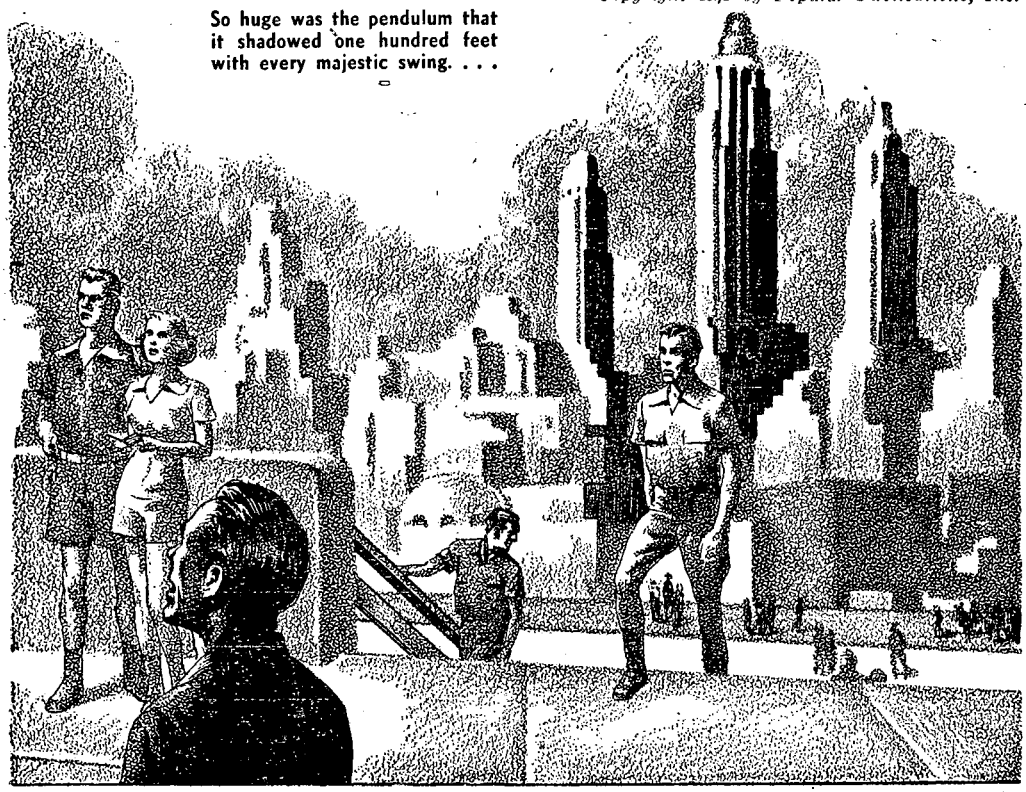

So huge was the pendulum that it shadowed one hundred feet with every majestic swing. . . .

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chamber—transparent, glassite—and that awful thing staring out of it. . . ."

Pressed close to the inner side of the pendulum head was a single human skeleton. The whitened skull seemed to stare out over the desolate, crumbling city as though regarding with amusement the heaps of powdery masonry and the bare steel girders that drooped to the ground, giving the effect of huge spiders poised to spring.

"It's enough to make one shudder—the way that thing grins! Almost as though—"

"The grin means nothing!" Erjas interrupted annoyedly. "That is only the skeletal remains of one of the mammal creatures who once, undoubtedly, inhabited this world." He shifted nervously from one spindly leg to the other, as he glanced again at the grinning skull. "And yet, it does seem to be almost—triumphant! And why are there no more of them around? Why is he the only one . . . and why is he encased in that fantastic pendulum head?"

"We shall soon know," another of the bird creatures trilled softly, glancing at their spaceship which rested amidst the ruins, a short distance away. "Orfleew is even now deciphering the strange writing in the book he salvaged from the pendulum head. We must not disturb him."

"How did he get the book? I see no opening in that transparent chamber."

"The long pendulum arm is hollow, apparently in order to vacuum out the cell. The book was crumbing with age when Orfleew got it out, but he saved most of it."

"I wish he would hurry! Why must he—"

"Shh! Give him time. Orfleew will decipher the writing; he has an amazing genius for alien languages."

"Yes. I remember the metal tablets on that tiny planet in the constellation—"

"Here he comes now!"

"We shall soon know the story . . ."

The bird creatures fairly quivered as Orfleew appeared in the open doorway of their spaceship, carefully carrying a sheaf of yellowed pages. He waved to them, spread his wings and soared outward. A moment later he alighted beside his companions on their narrow perch.

"The language is simple," Orfleew told them, "and the story is a sad one. I will read it to you and then we must depart, for there is nothing we can do on this world."

They edged closer to him there on the metal strand, eagerly awaiting the first words. The pendulum hung very straight and very still on a windless world, the transparent head only a few feet above the plaza floor. The grinning skull still peered out as though hugely amused or hugely satisfied. Orfleew took one more fleeting look at it . . . then he opened the crumbling notebook and began to read . . .

MY NAME is John Layeville. I am known as "The Prisoner of Time." People, tourists, from all over the world, come to look at me in my swinging pendulum. School children, on the electrically moving sidewalks surrounding the plaza, stare at me in childish awe. Scientists, studying me, stand out there and train their instruments on the swinging pendulum head. Oh, they could stop the swinging, they could release me—but now I know that will never happen. This all began as a punishment for me, but now I am an enigma to science. I seem to be immortal. It is ironic.

A punishment for me! Now, as through a mist, my memory spins back to the day when all this started. I remember I had found a way to bridge time gaps and travel into futurity. I remember the time device I built. No, it did not in any way resemble this pendulum—my device was merely a huge box-like affair of specially treated metal and glassite, with a series of electric rotors of my own design which set up conflicting, but orderly, field of stress. I had tested it to perfection no less than three times, but none of the others in the Council of Scientists would believe me. They all laughed. And Leske laughed. Especially Leske, for he has always hated me.

I offered to demonstrate to prove. I invited the Council to bring others—all the greatest minds in the scientific world. At last, anticipating an amusing evening at my expense, they agreed.

I shall never forget that evening when a hundred of the world's greatest scientists gathered in the main Council laboratory. But they had come to jeer, not to cheer. I did not care, as I stood on the platform beside my ponderous machine and listened to the amused murmur of voices. Nor did I care that millions of other unbelieving eyes were watching by television, Leske having indulged in a campaign of mockery against the possibility of time travel. I did not care, because I knew that in a few minutes Leske's campaign would be turned into victory for me. I would set my rotors humming, I would pull the control switch—and my machine would flash away into a time dimension and back again, as I had already seen it do three times. Later we would send a man out in the machine.

The moment arrived. But fate had decreed it was to be my moment of doom. Something went wrong, even now I do not know what or why. Perhaps the television concentration in the room affected the stress of the time-fields

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my rotors set up. The last thing I remember seeing, as I reached out and touched the main control switch, were the neat rows of smiling white faces of the important men seated in the laboratory. My hand came down on the switch . . .

Even now I shudder, remembering the vast mind-numbing horror of that moment. A terrific sheet of electrical flame, greenish and writhing and alien, leaped across the laboratory from wall to wall, blasting into ashes everything in its path!

Before millions of television witnesses I had slain the world's greatest scientists!

No, not all. Leske and myself and a few others who were behind the machine escaped with severe burns. I was least injured of all, which seemed to increase the fury of the populace against me. I was swept to a hasty trial, faced jeering throngs who called out for my death.

"Destroy the time machine," was the watchword, "and destroy this murderer with it!"

Murderer! I had only sought to help humanity. In vain I tried to explain the accident, but popular resentment is a thing not to be reasoned with.

One day, weeks later, I was taken from my secret prison and hurried, under heavy guard, to the hospital room where Leske lay. He raised himself on one arm and his smouldering eyes looked at me. That's all I could see of him, just his eyes; the rest of him was swathed in bandages. For a moment he just looked; and if ever I saw insanity, but a cunning insanity, in a man's eyes, it was then.

For about ten seconds he looked, then with a great effort he pointed a bulging, bandaged arm at me.

"No, do not destroy him," he mumbled to the authorities gathered around. "Destroy his machine, yes, but save the parts. I have a better plan, a fitting one, for this man who murdered the world's greatest scientists."

I remembered Leske's old hatred of me, and I shuddered.

* * *

In the weeks that followed, one of my guards told me with a sort of malicious pleasure of my time device being dismantled, and secret things being done with it. Leske was directing the operations from his bed.

At last came the day when I was led forth and saw the huge pendulum for the first time. As I looked at it there, fantastic and formidable, I realized as never before the extent of Leske's insane revenge. And the populace seemed equally vengeful, equally cruel, like the ancient Romans on a gladiatorial holiday. In a sudden panic of terror, I shrieked and tried to leap away.

That only amused the people who crowded the electrical sidewalks around the plaza. They laughed and shrieked derisively.

My guards thrust me into the glass pendulum head and I lay there quivering, realizing the irony of my fate. This pendulum had been built from the precious metal and glassite of my own time device! It was intended as a monument to my slaughtering! I was being put on exhibition for life within my own executioning device! The crowd roared thunderous approval, damning me.

Then a little click and a whirring above me, and my glass prison began to move. It increased in speed. The arc of the pendulum's swing lengthened. I remember how I pounded at the glass, futilely screaming, and how my hands bled. I remember the rows of faces becoming blurred white blobs before me . . .

I did not become insane, as I had thought at first I would. I did not mind it so much, that first night. I couldn't sleep but it wasn't uncomfortable. The lights of the city were comets with tails that pelted from right to left like foaming fireworks. But as the night wore on I felt a gnawing in my stomach that grew worse until I became very sick. The next day was the same and I couldn't eat anything.

In the days that followed they never stopped the pendulum, not once. They slid my food down the hollow pendulum stem in little round parcels that plucked at my feet. The first time I attempted eating I was unsuccessful; it wouldn't stay down. In desperation I hammered against the cold glass with my fists until they bled again, and I cried hoarsely, but heard nothing but my own weak words muffled in my ears.

After an infinitude of misery, I began to eat and even sleep while traveling back and forth this way . . . they had allowed me small glass loops on the floor with which I fastened myself down at night and slept a sound slumber, without sliding. I even began to take an interest in the world outside, watching it tip one way and another, back and forth and up and down, dizzily before my eyes until they ached. The monotonous movements never changed. So huge was the pendulum that it shadowed one hundred feet or more with every majestic sweep of its gleaming shape, hanging from the metal intestines of the machine overhead. I estimated that it took four or five seconds for it to traverse the arc.

On and on like this—for how long would it be? I dared not think of it . . .

* * *

Day by day I began to concentrate on the gaping, curiosity-etched faces outside—faces that spoke soundless words, laughing and pointing at me, the prisoner of time, traveling

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forever nowhere. Then after a time—was it weeks or months or years?—the town people ceased to come and it was only tourists who came to stare . . .

Once a day the attendants sent down my food, once a day they sent down a tube to vacuum out the cell. The days and nights ran together in my memory until time came to mean very little to me . . .

IT WAS not until I knew, inevitably, that I was doomed forever to this swinging chamber, that the thought occurred to me to leave a written record. Then the idea obsessed me and I could think of nothing else.

I had noticed that once a day an attendant climbed into the whirring coggery overhead in order to drop my food down the tube. I began to tap code signals along the tube, a request for writing materials. For days, weeks, months, my signals remained unanswered. I became infuriated—and more persistent.

Then, at long last, the day when not only my packet of food came down the tube, but with it a heavy notebook, and writing materials! I suppose the attendant above became weary at last of my tappings! I was in a perfect ecstasy of joy at this slight luxury.

I had spent the last few days in recounting my story, without any undue elaboration. I am weary now of writing, but I shall continue from time to time—in the present tense instead of the past.

My pendulum still swings in its unvarying arc. I am sure it has been not months, but years! I am accustomed to it now. I think if the pendulum were to stop suddenly, I should go mad at the motionless existence!

(Later): There is unusual activity on the electrically moving sidewalks surrounding me. Men are coming, scientists, and setting up peculiar looking instruments with which to study me at a distance. I think I know the reason. I guessed it some time ago. I have not recorded the years, but I suspect that I *have already outlived Leske and all the others.* I know my cheeks have developed a short beard which suddenly ceased growing, and I feel a curious, tingling vitality. I feel that I shall outlive them all! I cannot account for it, nor can they out there, those scientists who now examine me so scrupulously. And they dare not stop my pendulum, my little world, for fear of the effect it may have on me!

(Still later): These men, these puny scientists, have dropped a microphone down the tube to me. They have actually remembered that I was once a great scientist, encased here cruelly. In vain they have sought the reason for my longevity; now they want me to converse with them, giving my symptoms and reactions and suggestions! They are perplexed, but hopeful, desiring the secret of eternal life to which they feel I can give them a clue. I have already been here two hundred years, they tell me; they are the fifth generation.

At first I said not a word, paying no attention to the microphone. I merely listened to their babblings and pleadings until I wearied of it. Then I grasped the microphone and looked up and saw their tense, eager faces, awaiting my words.

"One does not easily forgive such an injustice as this," I shouted. "And I do not believe I shall be ready to until five more generations."

Then I laughed. Oh, how I laughed.

"He's insane!" I heard one of them say: "The secret of immortality may be somehow with him, but I feel we shall never learn it; and we dare not stop the pendulum—that might break the timefield, or whatever it is that's holding him in thrall . . ."

* * *

(Much later): It has been a longer time than I care to think, since I wrote those last words. Years . . . I know not how many. I have almost forgotten how to hold a pencil in my fingers to write.

Many things have transpired, many changes have come in the crazy world out there.

Once I saw wave after wave of planes, so many that they darkened the sky, far out in the direction of the ocean, moving toward the city; and a host of planes arising from here, going out to meet them; and a brief, but lurid and devastating battle in which planes fell like leaves in the wind; and *some* planes triumphantly returning, I know not which ones . . . .

But all that was very long ago, and it matters not to me. My daily parcels of food continue to come down the pendulum stem; I suspect that it has become a sort of ritual, and the inhabitants of the city, whoever they are now, have long since forgotten the legend of why I was encased here. My little world continues to swing in its arc, and I continue to observe the puny little creatures out there who blunder through their brief span of life.

Already I have outlived generations! Now I want to outlive the very last one of them! I shall!

. . . Another thing, too, I have noticed. The attendants who daily drop the parcels of food for me, and vacuum out the cell, are robots! Square, clumsy, ponderous and four-limbed things—unmistakably metal robots, only vaguely human in shape.

. . . I begin to see more and more of these clumsy robots about the city. Oh, yes, humans too—but *they* only come on sight-seeing tours and pleasure jaunts now; *they* live, for the

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most part, in luxury high among the towering buildings. Only the robots occupy the lower level now, doing all the menial and mechanical tasks necessary to the operation of the city. This, I suppose, is progress as these self-centered beings have willed it.

. . . robots are becoming more complicated. last words. Years . . . I know not how many more human in shape and movements . . . and more numerous . . . uncanny . . . I have a premonition . . .

(Later): It has come! I knew it! Vast, surging activity out there . . . the humans, soft from an aeon of luxury and idleness, could not even escape . . . those who tried, in their rocket planes, were brought down by the pale, rosy electronic beams of the robots . . . others of the humans, more daring or desperate, tried to sweep low over the central robot base and drop thermite bombs—but the robots had erected an electronic barrier which hurled the bombs back among the planes, causing inestimable havoc . . .

The revolt was brief, but inevitably successful. I suspect that all human life except mine has been swept from the earth. I begin to see, now, how cunningly the robots devised it.

The humans had gone forward recklessly and blindly to achieve their Utopia; they had designed their robots with more and more intricacy, more and more finesse, until the great day when they were able to leave the entire operation of the city to the robots—under the guidance perhaps of one or two humans. But somewhere, somehow, one of those robots was imbued with a spark of intelligence; it began to think, slowly but precisely; it began to add unto itself, perhaps secretly; until finally it had evolved itself into a terribly efficient unit of inspired intelligence, a central mechanical Brain which planned this revolt.

At least, so I pictured it. Only the robots are left now—but very intelligent robots. A group of them came yesterday and stood before my swinging pendulum and seemed to confer among themselves. They surely must recognize me as one of the humans, the last one left. Do they plan to destroy me too?

No. I must have become a legend, even among the robots. My pendulum still swings. They have now encased the operating mechanism beneath a protective glassite dome. They have erected a device whereby my daily parcel of food is dropped to me mechanically. They no longer come near me; they seem to have forgotten me.

This infuriates me! Well, I shall outlast them too! After all, they are but products of the human brain . . . I shall outlast everything even remotely human! I swear it! To that end, I shall exert all my knowledge!

(Much later): Is this really the end? *I have seen the end of the reign of the robots!* Yesterday, just as the sun was crimsoning in the west, I perceived the hordes of things that came swarming out of space, expanding in the heavens . . . alien creatures fluttering down, great gelatinous masses of black that clustered thickly over everything . . .

I saw the robot rocket planes crisscrossing the sky on pillars of scarlet flame, blasting into the black masses with their electronic beams—but the alien things were unperturbed and unaffected! Closer and closer they pressed to earth, until the robot rockets began to dart helplessly for shelter.

To no avail. The silvery robot ships began crashing to earth in ghastly devastation.

And the black gelatinous masses came ever closer, to spread over the earth, to crumble the city and corrode all exposed metal.

Except my pendulum. They came dripping darkly down over it, over the glassite dome which protects the whirring wheels and roaring bowels of the mechanism. The city has crumbled, the robots are destroyed, but my pendulum still moves, the only thing in this world now . . . and I know that fact puzzles these alien things and they will not be content until they have stopped it . . .

This all happened yesterday. I am lying very still now, watching them. Most of them are gathering out there over the ruins of the city, preparing to leave—except a few of the black quivering things that are still hanging to my pendulum, almost blotting out the sunlight; and a few more above, near the operating machinery, concentrating those same emanations by which they corroded the robots. They are determined to do a complete job here. I know that in a few minutes they will begin to take effect, even through the glassite shield. I shall continue to write until my pendulum stops swinging . . . it is happening now. I can feel a peculiar grinding and grating in the coggery above. Soon my tiny glassite world will ease its relentless arc.

I feel now only a fierce elation flaming within me, for after all, this is *my* victory! I have conquered over the men who planned this punishment for me, and over countless other generations, and over the final robots themselves! There is nothing more I desire except annihilation, and I am sure that will come automatically when my pendulum ceases, bringing me to a state of unendurable motionlessness . . .

It is coming now. Those black, gelatinous shapes above are drifting away to join their companions. The mechanism is grinding raucously. My arc is narrowing . . . smaller . . . I feel . . . so strange . . . ■ ■ ■

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By Arthur Dekker Savage

BERNIE GOES TO HELL

Bernie had always written his own ticket — but this time he was up against the Devil himself.

DYING didn't seem to affect Big Bernie at all. Of course, our deaths hadn't been like any of us expected, but by the time I was able to think halfway straight Bernie was lighting one of his hoarded cigars and looking over the strange new terrain with a wary eye.

Due to its trajectory, we'd had a chance to see the bomb coming at us, and had known it was curtains. I remembered it was the first time I was really scared bad.

Bernie squinted up at the sun. Yeah, there was a sun, but it was damn different from what we was used to. In fact, the whole hilly, shrub and tree covered country was different.

"Well, boys," said Bernie, taking the cigar out of his face and looking at it instead of us, "it looks like we made the Trip." There was no doubt what he meant.

Strangler Hazlitt cleared his throat. "Sure funny we come through with our uniforms and stuff, ain't it? And nobody hurt."

Bernie laughed deep in his chest. "Just goes to show how things are different from what people think. My poppa used to say, 'Don't believe it, Bernie, until you got your hands on it.'" The muscles of his big jaw knotted a couple of times. "But don't think we ain't hurt—where we just come from, there's parts of us still fallin' to the ground."

It was kind of hard to get used to, at first. We stood around, just thinking, until Bones Melton began to make screwy noises in his throat. We looked at him. The poor guy was white and kind of rigid, staring into space.

Bernie went over and put his arm around him, then slapped him once, fast. Bones snapped out of it, and Bernie helped him sit down on the ground and sort of squatted beside him. Bernie's sort of big through the middle, too, and squatting isn't so easy for him, but he got Bones to feeling better.

Finally Bernie looked up at the rest of us. "All right, you dumb dopes," he said, "siddown and take a rest while you got a chance—we don't know what we'll run up against here!"

After a while Corporal Bernie Hynes called a huddle and we counted noses. Strangler Hazlitt, Bones Melton, Tex Radicke, Hod Morelli, Johnny Kusevic and me—Slim Prater. There'd been a lot of other boys in the vicinity, of course, so we figured we was the only ones who'd got the complete business.

By now Bernie had his cigar worked down to a nub. We'd tried to dope out this death business and figure where we were. "Listen," said Bernie at last, "any of you guys religious?" No one said anything. "Okay," continued Bernie, "I'll tell you what I figure—I figure we're in Hell." He spit out a piece of tobacco.

Hod Morelli didn't like that. "Whadda ya mean—Hell? You don't know no more about it than the rest of us!" Strangler Hazlitt scratched an itchy spot and nodded agreement.

Bernie kind of bristled. "Look—you guys are all so damn stupid you couldn't tell which end was up if you didn't wear a hat. You leave me do the thinkin' for this outfit!"

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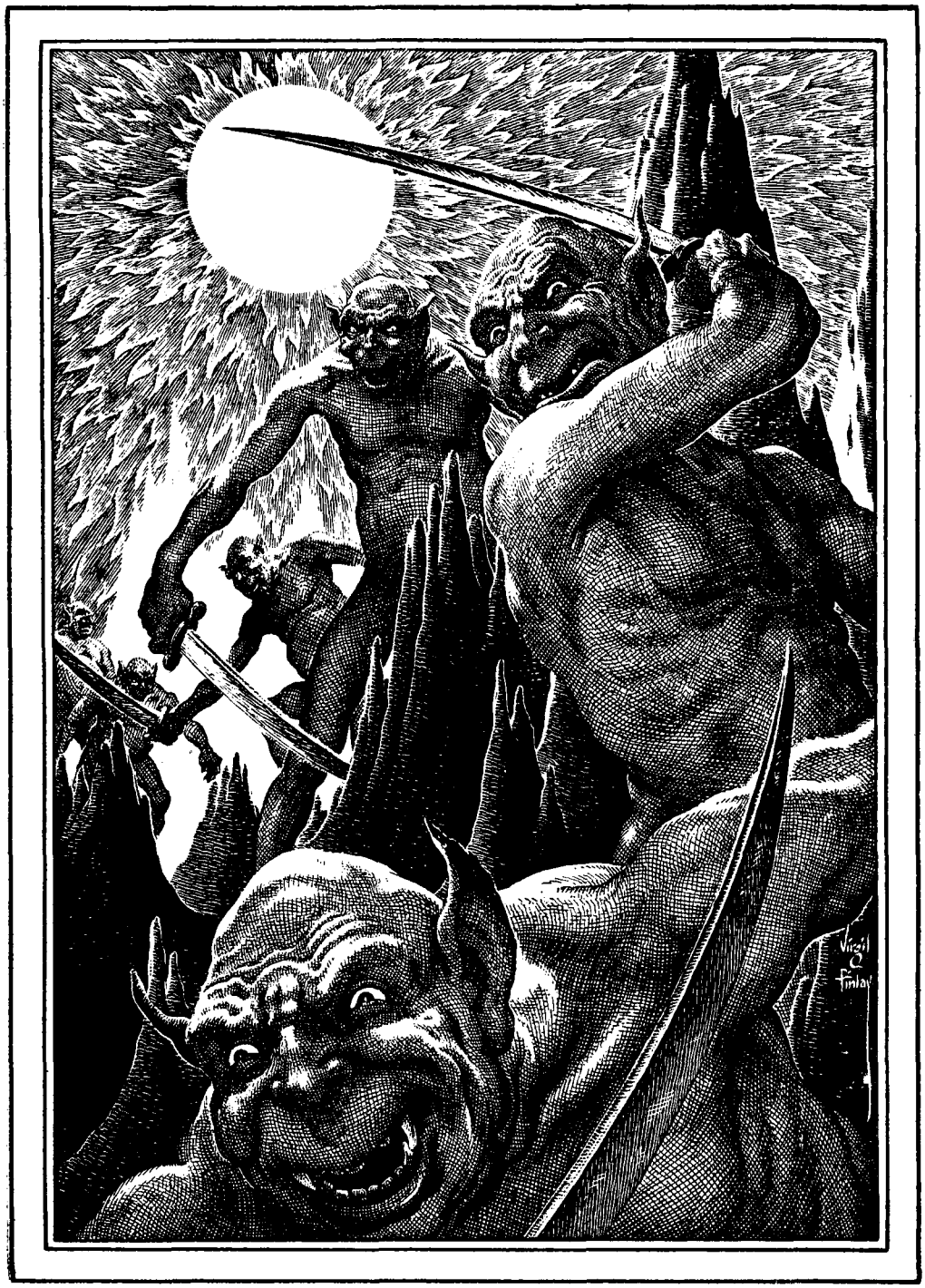

"They busted out of cover yelling. . . ."

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He'd told us that other times before and I believed him, but Strangler had other ideas. "'Jest a minute, Bernie—where do you get off givin' orders now? We're dead, ain't we? Who give you your rank *here?*" Strangler was a pretty hefty mug himself, and wasn't afraid of man or beast. Or even of Bernie. Most people would take a look at Bernie's wide, battered face, with its mashed nose—which he'd gotten in the ring—and let him write his own ticket.

Bernie stood up slow, pulled in his stomach a little and hung his thumbs in his belt. He looked at all of us before he opened his mouth and removed the cigar butt. "I can whip anybody here," he said, "but I don't see no sense in it. I got more brains than all the rest of you put end to end, but we're going to run this outfit democratic. We're gonna vote for the boss. You got any objection to that, Strangler?"

Strangler doesn't think very fast, but when he gets hold of a guy he turns him every way but loose. He seemed to get Bernie's idea, though. "The votin' part sounds good," he said, "but I'd whip you just for the hell of it if I hadn't damn near busted my wrist crankin' that jeep this morning." We all knew Strangler wasn't backing out. He was just being reasonable—and he wasn't mad, which made a lot of difference.

Bernie chuckled like he was sure of himself. "Okay, Strangler. But lemme tell you somethin'. There's nothin' wrong with your wrist now—feel it and see."

Strangler worked his wrist and blinked a few times. "My God, there ain't!" he said.

"'Course there ain't!" said Bernie. "If you get here at all, you get here okay." He pouted out his chest some, which made his belt looser. "And I'll tell you why this is Hell—everything's red, ain't it? Look at the leaves on them bushes and trees—even the grass!"

"You're right," I said. "It looks something like the color of poison oak leaves."

"Yeah," said Tex Radicke, "and the dirt's something like red sand, only it's dirt."

"But I don't see no fire," protested Johnny Kusevic. "It's kinda hot and dry, but I don't see no flames."

"You gotta forget what you heard about Hell," said Bernie. "That's just propaganda. Look at that sun if you wanta see flames."

He was right. The sun looked like a ball of red fire.

We took the vote right after that, and Bernie got it one hundred per cent. He admitted he'd voted for himself, but he said that didn't make any difference because he knew he was going to win anyway. It made sense, and we all felt better when the thing was settled, because Bernie always had a knack of looking after his boys pretty well. We'd always had hot coffee and blankets even when the rest of the regiment was eating cold tin and doing pushups to keep warm. You had to admit Bernie knew his stuff, even if he didn't always follow the book.

THE SUN didn't seem to move at all—it just hung on the horizon. We finally gathered some wood and heated up some rations. Bernie set up a sentry system when we turned in, and Johnny Kusevic took first duty with his automatic rifle.

The sun was in the same place when I woke up—with Tex poking me in the ribs and holding his hand over my mouth. "Hod seen a scoutin' party," he whispered.

Everyone else was awake and looking toward a rise about eighty yards away. I listened. There was a clanking sound—and voices—off in the brush. Bernie waved us into position with the choice profanity he always uses when we go into action.

I flopped behind a small mound, alongside of Hod Morelli. His skin is ordinarily kind of dark, but now he was pale as a ghost and looked as if he'd just seen one. "Devils," he was muttering. "Big, red devils!"

They must have known we was there. There was twelve of them, and they busted out of cover yelling—and waving swords. I would have laughed if it hadn't been for their looks. They were red and big, all right, about seven feet tall—but lean and wiry, not heavy. And no horns or tails. There was something about their faces, though . . . they were devils—no doubt about it. The sweat on my face turned cool.

Bernie didn't hesitate. "Johnny—start it goin'," he said.

Johnny Kusevic opened up with the automatic rifle. He let go with four shots, well spaced, like he was going to take the whole bunch one after the other. I've seen him do that. He just doesn't miss unless he's being shelled or strafed, and even then his percentage is plenty high.

But he stopped after that fourth shot—when he noticed that none of the devils had fallen. Four had staggered, but none went down.

"Okay!" barked Bernie. "Rake 'em!"

We opened up. One dropped like a log.

"In the head!" yelled Bones Melton. "Get 'em in the head!" Bones holds an expert rating.

We dropped five more before they were on us. It was a rough scrap. Those damn devils tossed aside their swords to grapple with us. We met them with bayonets—or started to.

When Strangler Hazlitt saw the devil that

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had chosen him throw away his sword, he leaped up at him barehanded, calling him dirty names. I could hear bones snapping even above the other noise. Hod used his belt knife to carve a big hole in one devil's belly, and Bernie knocked his boy ten feet away with a right uppercut.

Bernie's no slug.

By that time my devil had got past my bayonet. As he reached for me with his hands I went for my knife, but it was a long time later before I knew what happened.

I figured I was out for about a half hour. I came to just like waking up, and thought at first the devils had got reinforcements. But right away I noticed that six of them had holes in their foreheads—and were acting as if they didn't even feel them. Ten were on their feet, holding their swords, and one was sticking Hod in the groin to bring him to. The one Hod had gutted was sitting down, with his belly wrapped up in strips of a shirt—Johnny's—and Strangler's opponent had wood splints on both arms. But they were all alive, and they all had wet-looking punctures in them here and there.

We found out pretty soon what a death march was like. It was hard, sometimes, to realize we were already dead. Right after we'd started to walk, I asked Bernie what had happened.

He talked around a new cigar. "It's like this judo stuff, Slim," he explained. "Only they know spots I never heard of. They poke you, and you're out like that."

"They must want us alive," I reasoned.

"Bright boy," said Bernie.

"Wonder how come we couldn't kill 'em?" said Bones.

Bernie waved a hand. "They're dead as we are—in a way."

We all let it go at that until one of the devils explained things. I don't know why, but it made us feel better when we found they could talk our lingo. They had been jawing among themselves in some jerky jargon, when one of them suddenly spoke to Bernie.

"You are group leader?"

Tex's jaw dropped a yard, but Bernie didn't even seem surprised. "I'm the boss, by vote," he said, and didn't even look at the speaker.

Their leader's name was Rotan. Bones seemed to understand most of what Rotan told us about where we were, and explained it to us when we stopped for the first rest. Rotan had tossed off some fairly big words.

"Rotan says nobody on this world is really dead," said Bones. "In fact, he says everybody is kinda super-alive—including us, now that we're here. He says there's gotta be some kind of special conditions for mortals to cross their dimensional threshold—whatever that means—and that our people have been poppin' through and clutterin' up Hell for a long time." Bones used to read a lot, but he can't think on his feet like Bernie can.

Strangler grunted. "So what? What's the score?"

"So we're slaves," said Bernie, and winked. "So if we don't do what these monkeys tell us, they'll damn well make us wish we had."

"How can they make us?" demanded Hod. "We can't be killed any more, can we?"

"We can still feel pain," Bernie reminded him, "and what would happen if our heads was cut off?"

"You are intelligent," said Rotan. He had sneaked up on us, and was looking at Bernie with a funny gleam in his eye. "You will see Satan."

Every day we walked toward the sun, which made it seem to rise higher in the sky. Bones said the planet rotated at the same speed as it traveled around the sun, but anyone could see that the damn thing just hung there and got hotter.

We took turns carrying the gutted devil on a litter made of branches.

On the third day—going by our watches—the devil with the broken arms took off his splints, and the one with the carved belly tossed aside his wrappings and started to walk—and there wasn't even a scar where Hod had operated.

The devils wore only a kind of breechcloth and leather harness, all yellow, and pretty soon we threw away everything but our helmets, one shirt and pants apiece, belts, socks and shoes. We'd been forced to abandon our guns, but had kept our belt knives with no argument. Bernie gave orders to keep wearing our helmets, and as our shoes wore out he made us go barefoot for longer and longer times, until our feet got tough enough to throw away the footwear.

There was no chow problem—as far as quantity went. There was a juicy kind of thing like a cocoanut that grew wild, and we ate them. We got sick of the sight of them, but we never were given anything else on that trip. Johnny and Tex got into an argument over what would happen if we just stopped eating altogether, but they never did settle it.

On the ninth day we saw the first of civilization—big rolling farms, ditch-irrigated from wells, and what looked like ordinary people working in the fields, sun-tanned and as near naked as the devils. They didn't even bother to look at us. We came to a village that was what I imagine the old towns of knights and yeomen and stuff was like—stone buildings, a sort of small castle and a lot of grass-thatched

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huts. Everything was of different shades of red.

The country began to be pretty heavily populated. There were wide dirt roads. Members of the devil race lounged here and there, and I got the idea they were supervisors. We didn't see any animals, people carried things in sacks and baskets. There was evidently plenty of manpower. And womanpower. And it was because of the latter that we really got into trouble.

We were resting near a group of farmers when Tex called something eager to a cute half-bare brunette working alongside the road. She just looked scared and kept on yanking up red vegetables, and one of our guards grunted something to Tex. But Tex had his mind on the chick. He got up and darted over. The devil drew his sword and went after him. Bernie and I, who were closest, followed the devil.

Tex had almost reached the girl when the devil whapped him with the flat of his blade. It didn't seem to hurt Tex much, but it peeved him. He landed a fast left and was following with a roundhouse right when the devil lashed out with his sword. It cut off Tex's right hand at the wrist.

I jumped fast and got in a good solid groin kick from the rear, and Bernie grabbed the devil's sword and swung it. There was a lot of hollering behind us as the devil's head rolled along the ground, and then one of his buddies must have reached me, because I went down for the count again.

DURING the next month we learned what Hell was all about. We were forced to wear leg chains, walk twice as far between rests, and got less than half our regular amount of food and no water except when we happened to stop near one of those ungodly deep wells and hauled up a helmet full. Our tongues swelled up, we lost weight, the ankle bracelets cut into our skin till we trailed blood half the time and hurt so bad we could hardly make it. I began to wish I could die again, but after each rest the skin on my ankles was half grown back. Tex's bandage finally fell off his wrist—and damned if there wasn't the start of another hand, which was just beginning to sprout.

We dragged along, hitting more and bigger towns and wider roads, until we approached a stone-walled city that filled the horizon. The sun was now directly overhead, and it must have been a hundred and twenty in the shade. With no shade.

Bernie nodded toward the city. "That's it, boys," he panted.

"What's what?" Johnny gasped.

"That's gonna be home for a while," said Bernie. He was right. Bernie seemed to know all the answers, and I always figured he should have been a second looie.

They prodded us through the crowded, narrow streets, and then, as the part of my brain that was only half dead began to appreciate some of the smooth female population, they took us up to a huge red castle, over a bridge across a ditch, and finally inside. It was some cooler in there, and by the time we got pretty far underground and shoved into a big dungeon it was almost comfortable—except for the smell.

Bernie stretched out on the stone floor while our chains were being taken off. "Kinda poor headquarters," he said to me, "but it'll do for a start."

I thought he'd slipped a cog, but I was too tired to care right then—and I was wrong.

After we'd heaved aside our helmets and slept awhile, Bernie called a huddle. "Listen," he said, "you guys keep your knives around on the back of your belts and act like you ain't even got 'em. We want them devils to forget about 'em till we're ready to show our hand."

"Hell, Bernie," said Hod. "What good are knives? These rascals got swords!"

"You just do what I say," said Bernie. "You remember when Bones shot that devil in the head?"

Bernie looked disgusted. "How about that—ain't you guys got no sense at all?" When nobody answered, he went on. "Look. When you sock something into their brains, it knocks 'em out for a while, don't it? Okay. Now," he said carefully, "when I give the word, you stab up under the chin right into the brain. Then you just grab the sword and cut off the head, like the one we got back on the road."

"My God!" said Strangler, looking interested. "That's a damn good idea!"

I tried to show how smart I was. "Why don't we just line up on either side of the doorway, and when the guard comes with chow we jump him?"

Bernie wagged his head as though he had a bad taste in his mouth. "We ain't gonna touch that guard," he said. "He's gonna be our buddy-buddy."

It just went to show how smart Bernie is. He palled up to the devil that kept bringing our chow, and if he got a gleam in his eye when he looked at the key hanging from the yellow belt, the devil didn't notice it.

His name was Werj, and he could talk as good English as Rotan and the others had. One time Bernie asked him how come.

"Speak any mortal language," said Werj. "Have long to learn." He'd gotten so he'd

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fold his long length into a corner, wrap up well in his yellow cloak to keep warm, and answer questions by the hour.

"How old are you, Werj?" asked Bernie.

Werj shrugged. "Ever. Since born. Six Satans."

We all pricked up our ears. Bernie followed it up. "You mean five of your kings have died?"

Werj shrugged again. "New Satan remove other Satan. New Satan sit on throne. No difference."

He didn't seem to care much.

"Remove," said Bernie. "How do you mean, remove?"

"Cut off head. Burn parts." He stood up. "I go now."

We looked at Bernie with renewed respect.

We learned a lot from Werj. He seemed lonesome and glad to have someone to jaw with. We didn't let it get us, though—he was still a warrior, seven feet tall, plenty of beef and ugly as sin.

And cold-blooded. Bones figured it out first. The temperature was just right for us, but we noticed Werj always kept himself wrapped up in his cloak, and he said he didn't like to stay underground too long at a time, nor go near the Rim.

Bones got the drift of that, too. It seemed that the other side of this world was cold because the sun never hit it. Hell evidently took up half the planet, surrounded by a cool twilight zone called the Rim, where the devils never went. People kept dropping in all over the place, and there were patrols always scouting the border regions.

Most people were put to work farming, mining, quarrying and a lot of other kinds of labor, but Werj said we were locked up because Bernie had eliminated one of the master race. He didn't seem mad about it, himself—in fact, I got the idea that all devils were pretty much indifferent to everything. They sure weren't like people.

WHEN Tex's new hand had grown to about the size of a baby's we were taken before Satan.

A whole slew of guards came for us, dressed in black harness with jewels that glittered in the oil-lamp light. When we reached the upper levels of the castle the daylight damn near blinded us, and the heat hit us hard. We were taken through long corridors and big halls filled with human servants hurrying about. There were rugs on the floors and ornaments on the walls.

The throne room was really something. There was even a fountain throwing water into the air—and a whole flock of really choice gals sitting around on the floor and on stone benches. Their harness was barely visible.

Tex whistled. "Boy!," he said, "this ain't Hell!" Tex has always been sort of one way when it comes to women.

But it was Satan himself that nearly floored us—he was a human!

The throne was big, but Satan was just an ordinary-looking guy, about middle age, with thinning dark hair neatly parted on the side. His skin was kind of pale, as though he didn't get out in the sun much, and he was paunchy. But his black harness was so covered with jewels it looked like it was alive, and he had a gold crown on his head. There were eight blondes hanging around him, and a line of guards several yards away on each side of the throne platform, as though Satan didn't trust even his own goons to get too close. One of the blondes was fanning him.

We were brought right up to the platform and our guards dropped to their knees. Bernie did the same thing, and we followed his lead. Then the guards got up and backed off, and we stood up and waited.

Satan looked at Bernie. "What's your name?" he snapped. There was a funny look in his eye, and you could tell by his voice that he was used to being head man.

"Bernie Hynes, your majesty," said Bernie, as cool as if he was answering a mess sergeant.

Satan got all excited. He shoved a blonde out of the way and glared at Bernie.

Bernie got a little pale and his jaw tightened, but he didn't say anything.

"You are all guilty of murdering one of the master race and plotting against our rule!" Satan yelled.

Something about that sounded familiar, but Bernie spoke up quick. "Gosh, your majesty," he said, "I didn't think you was one of the master race." He looked innocent as a babe—a young one.

Satan pulled up, dignified. "I," he said, "am a smaller, fairer member of the master race." Then he changed again, and got that wild look. "For your crimes, you will all be utterly disposed of!"

Bernie put his hands behind his back and made a cutting motion across his wrist with one finger. We got ready.

"But your majesty," said Bernie, "how can we be killed again?"

Satan put on a nasty smile. "You need not die. You will merely be peeled, at first. Starting with your feet, you will be—"

Bernie screamed—a high, blood-curdling yell like a wounded panther. It used to be pretty effective in an attack, and it almost worked now. The blondes were paralyzed, and we reached the platform, with Bernie in the

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lead, before Satan recovered. But when he did, we learned some more about Hell.

Satan just waved his hand—and we ran into a solid wall. It wasn't visible, but it was like running head-on into the side of a truck tire. You got the idea it yielded a little, but it didn't.

Even Bernie was so confused that we just stood there while the guards surrounded us with bare swords and took our knives.

Satan was fit to be tied. He turned reddish-purple, stamped his feet, and then grabbed a shawl off his throne and began to rip it with his teeth. He couldn't talk, but he made throwing motions with one hand, and the guards took us back to the dungeon and locked us in again.

We all felt pretty low, but Bernie recovered first and got us to thinking. "Listen," he said, "didn't Satan seem kinda like we oughta know him?"

"His talk was sort of familiar," I said, "like something I've heard before. And his face . . ." I tried to concentrate.

"Yeah—yeah," said Bernie, urging me on, "his face, Slim. Suppose he had a *mustache?*"

Bones jumped to his feet. "Hey!" he yelled. *"Hitler!"*

There was no doubt about it. Satan was Hitler. We kicked it around awhile, and then Bernie told us how he'd doped it out. "When I saw Satan was a human, I remembered what Werj told us about them six Satans takin' over each other. I don't know much about history, but it seemed to me that guys like Ceasar and Napoleon and Hitler would be the type to knock each other off if they got to Hell."

"Seems like," said Hod, "if all them guys and their soldiers—besides a lot of others—came to Hell, there'd be even more people here."

Bone looked thoughtful. "I dunno. There's no lakes and oceans here, which leaves a lot more room for people than Earth had, even when only half the planet is used."

"The point," Bernie said heavily, "is *why* people come to Hell, instead of going somewhere else," That stopped us. "The reason," Bernie went on, "is that natural fighters come here."

He sat back and looked halfway pleased with himself.

But Tex shook his head. "Nope. That ain't right. All them slick dolls weren't never no soldiers!"

Bernie spit like he used to when he had cigars. "Didja ever figure there's more'n one way to fight? When a guy starts on the bottom of the heap, he's gotta fight everybody and everything to get his head above water—sometimes all his life, if he's got it in him to last." He stood up and leaned against the iron door. "But that ain't important—when I seen Satan I recognized him from pictures, and then—well, it all added up. Besides, Hitler was the last big wardog to get knocked off, wasn't he?"

THERE was no arguing that. We chewed it over, and Werj brought us some chow, and then we began to worry about what was going to happen next.

"That business he did wavin' his hand," said Strangler. "Damn it, a man can't get nowhere fightin' stuff like that."

Bernie seemed pretty low. "I know. That kinda beats me—and we ain't got all year to get goin', either. That peelin' deal. . . ." He swung on Bones. "Bones, you used to read a lot of different stuff. You ever hear of anything like whatever stopped us?"

Bones put his head in his hands. "Nope," he sighed. "Everything's so damn different here! People don't die, they can't hardly be killed, they grow new parts, like a frog—it's just a bunch of miracles."

Bernie sat up straight at that, and then he started to laugh and pound Bones on the back. "Bones," he said, "you done it, boy—you done it!"

Strangler took off in a low tackle, and I jumped Bernie from behind, pinning his arms. He swore like a topkick, but we got him down and Hod put a hand on his chest and tried to soothe him.

"Take it easy, Bernie," he said, real quiet. "Everything's gonna be—"

"Listen," said Bernie, "if you damn fools will get off me, I can do some thinkin'."

We let him up. He walked over to a corner and just stood there awhile with his back to us, and then he began to wave his hand every so often, like Satan had. We all sat there and watched him, looking at each other every now and then without saying anything. Bones took off his belt and took a turn around his wrist. He motioned at Bernie and raised his eyebrows at the rest of us. We nodded, but Bones whispered, "Not just yet," so we waited.

When Bernie turned around he was smiling. "Strangler," he said, "jump me again." I started to take off my belt.

"Naw," said Strangler. "I ain't mad, Bernie. C'mon over and siddown a while."

"Strangler," said Bernie, "you jump me. I ain't gonna get rough. If you don't, I'll pin your ears back."

Strangler shrugged his big shoulders and got up. We all moved with him, and when he lowered his head, spread his arms and rushed, we were right alongside him.

Bernie waved his hand at us.

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I heard Strangler's neck crack just before I almost brained myself against a wall I couldn't see. By the time we all recovered, Bernie was feeling of Strangler's neck. Strangler just laid there, looking around with his eyes, like he couldn't move.

"Busted," said Bernie. "Didn't mean to do that."

"What happened?" asked Johnny. His nose had started to bleed, but quit right away.

We used several belts to wrap around Strangler's neck, for support, while Bernie told us about it.

"Bones gimme the idea when he said *miracles*—and that things was so different here. All you gotta do," he said simply, "is wave your hand and *think* there's a wall. Just think hard."

"Wonder if I could do it," said Hod.

"You better be able to," said Bernie, "because we ain't got much time left." He laid hold of one end of a wooden bench. "You try it," he said. "I'll make it easy for you." And he swung the bench at Hod's head.

Hod looked surprised, then he waved his hand quick. The bench cracked against something and broke off the legs at one end.

We set the good end of the bench against the side of the dungeon and eased Strangler up against the incline and sat around to keep him company.

"You'll be able to move all right again before too long," said Bernie. "The rest of you guys better practice makin' walls."

We took turns throwing pieces of bench legs at each other and stopping them with walls. There was nothing to it, when you knew how. Once a piece bounced off a wall and almost hit Strangler—and damned if he didn't stop it with a wall without being able to move. We looked at him kind of surprised, and he made a croaking noise like he was laughing.

"I guess it's all in the mind," said Bones, "and waving your hand just sorta helps concentrate." He looked at Bernie. "I wonder why all the other people in Hell don't figure it out."

Bernie chuckled. "I asked my poppa something like that, once. He said, 'Bernie, everything is simple after somebody else thinks of it first'."

"They won't peel us now!" said Johnny.

"Nope," said Bernie, "but how you gonna keep from starving?"

We all looked blank.

"Look," said Bernie patiently. "So they come after us. So we put a wall across the door. So they leave us here."

Tex groaned, and we all didn't feel so good. "We got walls," said Tex, "but we still can't escape!"

"Can't we?" said Bernie sarcastically.

"Not from down here!" I said.

"Okay," said Bernie. "So we'll get rid of the opposition when they take us back upstairs."

I looked at him. "Bernie," I said, real soft, "Hitler's got a wall, too."

"Has he?" Bernie got up and came over to where I was standing. "Put up your wall, Slim, 'cause I'm gonna sink one up to the wrist in your belly!"

I could see he meant it, and threw up a wall quick—except that Bernie nailed me with a fast right which knocked me against the door. He hadn't put much into that punch, though.

Bones got excited. "Say, Bernie—can you do that with Hitler's wall?"

Bernie went over beside Strangler and told us to come in close. "Boys," he said, "We got a lead pipe cinch. Nobody in Hell but Hitler and us knows how to get rid of walls."

Johnny scratched his head. "Bernie," he said, kind of bashful, "I ain't sure I know how to do it, myself."

I was about to admit I didn't either, but Bernie gave us the low-down. "Nothin' to it," he said. He looked at Bones. "Bones, how do you make your wall?"

"Well," said Bones, "actually, I just imagine it's there."

"Okay," said Bernie. "When you wanta get rid of a wall, all you gotta do is imagine it *ain't* there." He laid down beside Strangler to take a nap. "Try it."

It worked. Werj brought us chow again and then Bernie told us his plans. He figured that any time anyone learned how to get rid of walls, one more Satan got shoved down the drain by the guy who knew how—which he said we were going to do to Hitler. Barring accidents. We had just begun to feel sort of perky when the devils with the black harness came for us again.

That fouled Bernie's plan up a little bit, because Strangler couldn't walk yet, and we had to carry him to the throne room.

THE place looked like Hitler was throwing a party. There were tables loaded with chow, a sort of orchestra making a loud din, and a chorus line giving out in the center of the big room. Them gals didn't have very much on.

There was a lot of devils around that looked like big brass, and they had devil females with them. It was the first time we'd seen their women. They didn't have such bad shapes, but their faces were no better than the men's.

In front of the throne was a big tray of burning charcoal, and above it was a caldron big enough to hold a man. There was a chain

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hanging from a tripod by which anything could be lowered into the caldron. In the caldron oil was bubbling.

We could feel the heat from the tray even where we were standing. Hitler was soaking with sweat, and the skin of his blondes glistened.

Everybody but Hitler's personal guard had

a drink in their hand and were stamping in time to the music. I looked at all the swords and wished we had our knives back.

"He must've figured peelin' was too good for us," whispered Bernie. "We'll hafta leave Strangler lay, but he can make him a good umbrella." Strangler winked to show he understood. I was kind of nervous, and Bones was chewing his lip.

Finally Hitler held up his hand. The music stopped and we started that business of going in front of the throne to bow.

Hod and Johnny timed it just right, laying Strangler down as the guards kneeled—and then Bernie yelled, "Hike!"

We all sprang toward the platform. Hitler jumped up with a wild, strangled shout and waved his hand. Bernie plowed on ahead and we stayed right beside him, two on one side, three on the other.

The blondes faded behind the throne. The guards snatched out their swords and tried to close in just as Bernie reached Hitler. We threw up a solid wall around the throne and stood by.

Bernie never hesitated. Hitler had jerked a long dagger out of his belt, but Bernie smashed him square in the face with all two hundred and eighty pounds behind his big fist. Blood squirted around his hand and Hitler's head pounded against the throne so hard that the back of his skull caved in. His gold crown rolled along the floor and I caught it with my toe and picked it up.

Bernie lifted Hitler by the harness and held him dangling while he got his breath. After the guards had run into our wall and hacked at it a few times they'd just stood and watched. All eyes in the room were on Bernie. He nodded toward the caldron. We formed a sort of corridor with our walls and he waddled along it with Hitler. When he reached the caldron he gave his load a boost with his knee, grunted, and heaved it into the boiling oil. Then he picked up Strangler gently and carried him back to the throne.

I handed the crown to Bernie while I wadded up a shawl and made a pillow for Strangler, and Bernie hung the thing on his head while he helped me—and damned if everybody in the room didn't kneel down. . . .

We didn't do much but eat and sleep for what must have been two weeks. Bernie put Werj in charge of the castle guard, and after we'd rested up he figured he'd reorganize Hell a little before we took off.

Bernie got to be pretty popular. We rounded up a lot of technicians and scientists, and finally got wheeled carts and a whole slew of labor-saving tools and gadgets built and distributed.

After that Bones was anxious to get going. He came in once while I was talking to Bernie, sat down and waved for one of the new girls to come over and fan him. "Listen," he said, kind of eager, "when we leave, why don't we go and see what's out around the Rim country?"

Bernie took the red cigar out of his mouth. One of the scientists had found something pretty much like tobacco. "What for?" he asked.

Bones accepted the goblet of red wine a girl handed him. "Well," he said, "there's half a world out there we don't know nothing about, and a lot of it would still get some light from the sun."

I signaled the ripe brunette with the back scratcher to go away. "So what?" I said. "It's probab'y cold, too."

"That's just the point," said Bones. He watched while a girl put a stool under his feet. "Remember all the stories we used to hear about Heaven? Everything was white, wasn't it? Maybe the white stuff was snow—after all, Hell wasn't exactly the way we'd heard."

Bernie leaned his head back so the girl with the atomizer wouldn't get perfume in his eyes. "I dunno," he said. "You figure we'd be better off in Heaven?"

Bones waited while his goblet was filled again. "Well," he said, "maybe not . . . maybe not." He belched.

"Besides," said Bernie, "I got our red boys watchin' for certain other guys to show up. We got plenty of oil." ■ ■ ■

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(Continued from page 10)

do is look at the pictures. Finlay, Lawrence and Bok are wonderful artists. I wish there were more illos.

To give you an idea what I liked best, here are some: "Drink We Deep" by A. L. Zagat, "Rebirth" by T. C. McClary, "The Death Maker" by A. J. Small, "Her Ways Are Death" by Jack Mann, Sax Rohmer's "The Bat Flies Low," Robert E. Howard's "Skull Face" and "Full Moon" by Talbot Mundy. I think this story is even better than Mundy's "The Gray Mahatma." Concerning the story by Theodore Sturgeon, I think it was the best short science fiction story you ever featured. All the others were very wonderful. Could you bring more by H. P. Lovecraft? "Pickman's Model" and "The Music of Eric Zann" were very good, especially the first one. How 'bout some by A. Merritt? What happened to "The Snake Mother"? Well, whatever you select will be all right with me. Already I am looking forward to your next novel by H. Rider Haggard.

Now I have to ask a favor of the readers of your magazine. Would anybody be interested in writing letters to a nineteen-year-old German boy? How I would like to have pen pals in America! I will answer every letter.

I would like to buy back issues of F.F.M. and F.N. Payment will be made by U. S. money orders.

Dear editor, consider this letter a great compliment to your excellent magazine. As a reader of "The Reader's Viewpoint," I never saw a letter from a European reader save England. But you see that your magazine is read on the continent too. The only thing left to say is, keep on publishing those wonderful stories!

Walter Spiegl.

(16) Niedernhausen/Ts.,
Platterstrasse 1,
Germany.

ANNUAL MIDWEST CONFERENCE

The 4th Annual Midwest Conference will take place at Indian Lake, Ohio, May 16 and 17. It is to be held at Beatley's Hotel, Russell's Point, Ohio. There are no dues, no dollar to send in. The entire hotel is reserved for fans. Reservations should be sent directly to the hotel after March 1st.

For the committee,
Donald E. Ford.

129 Maple Ave.,
Sharonville, Ohio.

P.S. Put me down as voting for a revival of *Fantastic Novels.*

MUNDY IN THE MOVIES

Though I have not yet finished reading "Full Moon", I feel compelled to write this letter now since I have some news that should please all readers of Talbot Mundy's works.

Twentieth Century Fox is currently working on a celluloid adaptation of Mundy's classic romance, "King—of the Khyber Rifles." The movie is to be a technicolored extravaganza and it will be filmed on location in India. Unless I am mistaken, TCF's "King" will be the most spectacular movie made during the last few years and should be infinitely better than MGM's recent "King Solomon's Mines", which, to my mind and notwithstanding the "Checklist", is not really a phantasy.

"King—of the Khyber Rifles" has been out of print for more years than I can remember and many of your readers may not have read this great epic. I think that if F.F.M. were to reprint "King" at about the time that the movie is released, your magazine would get a lot of free publicity and might gain some new followers.

Yours by the Heart of the Hills,

Irving Glassman.

3115, Brighton 4th St.,
B'klyn., 35, N.Y.

P.S. I'll be looking forward to "The Wanderer's Necklace". I've never read that story before and it seems to be a good one.

ROBERT CHAMBERS ENTHUSIAST

Although I have been a reader of F.F.M. since it's birth, I have had very little reason to add my voice to any controversies about it, but with Jim Fleming's fine letter in the Feb. issue, I feel it is about time to speak up!

Please, please, print Robert W. Chamber's masterpiece "King in Yellow". I have tried repeatedly to obtain this book, all to no avail.

I feel sure if a vote were taken a good majority of the readers would select this collection of stories. And more than that—the readers depend on F.F.M. to get just this type of story, since, like a number of your past books, the titles were unobtainable.

It has been my pleasure to read most of Mr. Chamber's novels. I believe "The King in Yellow" was his only fantastic work. For anyone who has not read at least part of it, it really is an experience. I know that should you print it, I would treasure the copy along with my collection of Merritt and Lovecraft.

Please make this faithful reader (and many others) very happy with the good word that Chamber's "King in Yellow" will be published very soon.

Should any of your readers have a bound issue of this work, I will give them a good trade in books, magazines, radio parts or anything else within reason.

Yours in "Fantasy",
G. Samkofsky.

Editor's Note: We published the stories from this collection which can be considered "fantastic" in F.F.M. A late edition can be bought from second hand book dealers. The original is very rare.

WANTS SOME HUMOR

Staggering away from the wreck of me sooper-dooper, galactic-drive equipped (you need one to cover the distance from Barnard 86 Saggittari to here in two weeks) one Bem qxsdrl, I stopped at a newsstand, then let out such a high-intensity vibration that it traveled through airless space and was detected on Mimas by the SA&MSC equipment there . . . you've finally ditched that horrible masthead, the new one looks purty good, too, though not as good as the '39-41 lightning flash or the more recent sunburst.

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That pome wuz purty gud.

Mundy's always good.

Now that you've broken down and published some of Howard's stuff, maybe if we keep hammering we'll get some more—"Black Stone," the two from *Strange Tales*, those Solomon Kane stories (best he wrote), "Fire of Ashurbanipal," etc.

Second Briney's nominations of the Rohmer stories, but not all Vivian is good.

Fleming does have access to a lot of addresses, doesn't he? I agree on "The King in Yellow." Also "Maker of Moons" and any other good stories by Chambers ("Slayer of Souls" was lousy). Since you've already printed part of "The King in Yellow," it would be fairly easy to finish.

Give us those Munsey stories!

Ahh, another History of Science-Fiction No. 3568¼, if I recall correctly.

I think the story Bob Hoskins is talking about is "Lost Legacy" by Lyle Monroe (Heinlein, all right) and is very excellent and well worth reprinting, though rather recent and easy to obtain. That was in the *Super Science Novels* period, as I remember, and a great many excellent stories ("Genus Homo," "Tumithak at Kaymak, etc.) were published in that period.

Do give us weirds—and while you're at it, some humor. Bloch has a *ghoulish* sense of humor. "The Shaving of Shagpat," by George Meredith is extremely good, and rare. One I'm not familiar with is: "In the Beginning"—Norman Douglas.

Heed Malone's request and print "The Scarlet Empire"—sounds good. Give us those Aubrey stories before every copy crumbles away and you can't.

Tom Condit.

Redding, Calif.

BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE

I have been a reader of fantastic and science-fiction stories for quite a number of years (beginning with the *Argosy All-Story* in the 1920's) and have been an enthusiastic reader of F.F.M. and F.N. since their beginnings.

Some of your stories I liked very much and some I did not like at all, but that is purely individual preference, as all your stories seem to be of a better calibre than those in many other magazines.

Many of your readers have written you trying to find back number magazines and I may be able to help some of them. I have about 240 magazines including 32 F.F.M., 18 F.N. as well as *Amazing, Astounding, Startling Stories,* etc. Most of these are from 1942 to date but there are several of each kind in the 1930-1940 period. I am prepared to dispose of these very reasonably as I have no room to keep them any longer.

Best wishes for your continued success.

L. D. Park.

Dryden, Ontario, Canada.

ENJOYED "FULL MOON"

Having just finished reading "Full Moon," I thought I would write to say how much I enjoyed it; also, the last three issues of F.F.M. My father was a great Fantasy reader and although we did not get your magazine, we read quite a few in book form. After I came over here from Scotland, I started to read various fantasy magazines, but yours is by far the best. Unfortunately, I don't get a chance to collect the magazines as my dad demands I send them on to him and Heaven help me if one issue is missing. In writing this letter I would also like to find out if it is possible to buy a copy (not too expensive) of Bram Stoker's "Dracula", which I have been searching for, for a number of years. In closing I would like to thank you again for F.F.M. which has given me many hours of enjoyment.

Mrs. R. W. Hamilton.

35, West,
Colter Lake,
British Columbia, Canada.

1952 A GOOD F.F.M. YEAR

Well, here I come again with letter number three and a renewal of my subscription for 1953. Believe it or not, I have not one little tiny fault to find. Every story was tops in '52.

I would like a few LaFarge stories—more, that is. Also, a few Heinlein.

I really enjoy "The Readers' Viewpoint" and just between us girls, if I could send thought waves to some who find fault with some of my favorite authors, wouldn't their brains burn—mmm???

Well, good-by till 1954 and a very happy '53 to you, Mary G.

Mrs. Hazel I. Taylor.

R. 1, Box 15,
Big Rock, Tenn.

WELL PLEASED

I have read both F.F.M. and F.N. from the first issues and am well pleased with the stories.

I now am selling some of my mags. I have 122 *Argosys* and a few copies of *All Story Weekly*. They run from 1917 to 1936. There are lots of stories that have never been reprinted in F.F.M. or F.N. in this lot, and fans that are looking for something different will find this is it. I wish to sell the lot for the best offer.

Thanking you.

Mr. Lee Kuick.

Rt. 1, Box 238,
Chehalis, Washington.

RARE MAGAZINES WANTED

Got the new F.F.M. today. The verdict:
"Full Moon—one of Mundy's better tales—fair plus.
"Eyes of Dromu"—poor.
Mag rating: fair minus.

Happy days are here again. "The Wanderer's Necklace" will be most welcome.

By the way, if any readers have copies of *Cavalier* 1909-1913 or *All Story* 1905-1914 or *Peoples* 2/10/18 or pre-20th century mags with stf., please contact me.

M. McNeil.

2019 McClendon,
Houston 25, Texas.

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CAN YOU HELP HIM?

I have enjoyed your magazine very much, especially the one containing "The Brood of the Witch-Queen." I have read many science fiction books and magazines and especially like the books of H. Rider Haggard, Edgar Rice Burroughs and H. G. Wells. Do you or the other fans of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* know where I can buy or borrow the following of H. Rider Haggard: "She," "Ayesha—The Return of She" and some of his others?

Also, I would like some by Edgar Rice Burroughs: i. e. "The Land That Time Forgot," "The Outlaw of Torn," "The Bandit of Hell's Bend," "Land of Terror" and any of his others. I would very much appreciate a letter from you or the fans of your magazine in reference to especially the Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels that I have listed above. These are out of print now.

S. C. Brewerton, M.D.

Magrath,
Alberta, Canada.

P.S. You know? Now that E. R. Burroughs is dead, his son or some of his fellow-workers should continue writing about his famous characters and republish his old novels. I am sure they would be very, very successful because so many people have read and are reading and will continue to read his works. Thanks again. Hope you can help.

P.P.S. In some of your older magazines, have you any stories by Burroughs and Haggard? Would it be possible to obtain them and also "Dian of Lost Land" and "Before the Dawn"? Do you know of any second-hand book stores that would have them? (Burroughs' novels, and F.F.M., I mean.)

FOR H.R.H. FANS

I never could figure out which one of Haggard's stories was his best; but I am positive that he never wrote anything better than "The Wanderer's Necklace."

Although I now have 120 Haggard titles (many of them in both 1st. English and American editions), I cannot seem to locate fourteen titles. If you have some Haggard's to sell or trade, please let me know.

I am also looking for "The Life and Letters of Conan Doyle" and a biography of Marie Corelli written by Bulloch. How about some of Corelli's titles: "The Mighty Atom," in which the hero hangs himself at the age of ten; "Sorrows of Satan," the greatest of all in the theme of a man who sold himself to the devil: and "Vendetta," in which a man remarries the wife who apparently murdered him, and his terrific revenge? Or "The Young Diana" who never grew any older.

I have finally decided that aside from "The Wanderer's Necklace," the best Haggard titles are: "Way of the Spirit", "Red Eve" and "Lady of

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Blossholme." I had a tough time in getting two of these titles.

I wish you would request the readers who would like to see a magazine devoted primarily to the writings of H. Rider Haggard published by you, to write in, and give their views. I realize that it would take quite a response from the read- I personally think you could muster enough readers to support it.

I have his autobiography, in two large volumes entitled 'Days of My life"; his biography, "The Cloak That I Left", written by his daughter Lilias (from whom I have received a letter); and Scott's "Bibliography of the Writings of Sir Henry Rider Haggard," so I know about as much about him as any ordinary person could. It is a great disappointment to me that no person has published "Letters of Haggard." I hate to miss anything that he has ever written. I have all of his non-fiction writings, also. Even "Rural England" in two immense volumes, dealing with farm land and crops, etc.

I even have a framed photograph of him on my desk.

Harold F. Keating.

7 Arnold St.,
Quincy 69.
Mass.

BOOKS AVAILABLE

I am a loyal reader of your magazine F.F.M. and have bought every issue and all of F.N. until the latter was given up. But this letter is not for my likes and dislikes, so I'll get down to brass tacks.

I always read "The Readers' Viewpoint" first before I even attempt to start to read the stories, and I find that a good many of your readers want to read old-time stories of Cummings, Kline, Garrett, Serviss, Lovecraft, etc.

Being an old-time reader and book and mag collector, I may have some book or mag that some reader of fantasy wants to read very badly, so in this case I am going to offer your readers a small amount of my books, which I will sell to anyone who wants to purchase them. That is, if they really do want them. A stamped, self-addressed envelope will bring you the list.

I have a hundred or so stf., fantasy and weird P/Bs also Mint at 20¢ each.

Now the book list: "Born in Captivity," Bryan Berry; "Beyond the Visible," H. J. Campbell; "Princess of the Atom," Ray Cummings; "Liners of Time," and "Golden Amazon Returns" by J. R. Fearn; "Adventure Isle," G. A. England; "Hunter of the Dark and others," H. P. Lovecraft; "Adventures with Phantoms," Hopkins; "Horror on the Asteroid and others," Edmond Hamilton; "A Man Divided," Olaf Stapledon; "Curse of Red Shiva," V. Meik; "Mariners of Space," E. Collins; "The Outsider and others," H. P. Lovecraft; "Flash Gordon in the Caverns of Mongo," A. Raymond; "Man Without a Soul," E. R. Burroughs; "Mystery of the Sea," B. Stoker; "Moon Pool," Merritt; "Land of Unreason," Pratt & DeCamp; "Second Deluge," G. Serviss: "Dr. Cyclops," Garth; "Slayer of Souls," R. W. Chambers; "In the Morning of Time," C. G. D. Roberts; "Purple Sapphire," John Taine; "In the Beginning," N. Douglas; "Cursed," G. A. England; "The Flying Legion," G. A. England; "By Rocket to the Moon," Otto Welli Gail; "Dream," S. F. Wright; "Crisis 1992," B. Herbert; "Honeymoon in Space," George Griffith; "Tarrano the Conqueror" Ray Cummings; "Planet of Peril," O. A. Kline; "Prince of Peril," O. A. Kline; "Maza of the Moon," O. A. Kline.

That is only a few I have for sale. Write, perhaps I have what you readers need.

Walter I. Norcott.

41 St. John's,
Worcester,
England.

MANY THANKS

I can never thank you enough for printing my letter in the February F.F.M. Through it I accomplished many things. These were:

1. I learned ten-thousand-fold more than I knew about fantasy-authors, titles, current prices, etc.
2. I opened up many enjoyable roads of reading, and hope to remain a permanent weird-fantasy fan.
3. I made many new friends, through the mails and in person.
4. I have amassed a collection of F.F.M., and issues of other mags. Judging which the best stories you have ever published would be very difficult, but I will say that "Undying Monster", "Skull-Face", House of the Secret", "The White Wolf", "Donovan's Brain" and "The Purple Cloud" all are on my list of top favorites, and as for short stories "The Outsider", "The Willows", "Novel of the Black Seal", "Lukundoo", "Man Who Collected Poe", "Tcheriapin", "Homecoming", and some other HPL reprints beside "The Outsider" all rank on my favorite short story list.

If my memory serves me, you never did publish "Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath", and as I have seen a never-ending flow of requests for this little Lovecraft gem, I say that it has just got to be published, and in the very near future. More suggestions? All right, here goes.

"Roads"—Quinn, "Lurker at the Threshold"—HPL and Derleth, "Web of Easter Island"—Wandrei, "Witch House"—Walton, "Goblin Tower"—Long, "Shadow over Innsmouth"—Lovecraft, "Jewel of Seven Stars", "Lair of the White Worm"—Stoker, "Horror from the Hills"—Long.

For shorts:

Some of the less known Lovecraft. Also why not something from the "Not at Nite" collections edited in London, or something from the o-p Arkham H. collections, or something from that little collector's dream, "The Shunned House and Others" by Lovecraft? Also, why not try to dig up some of the old, little-known anthologies?

Many thanks (and I speak for countless fans) for "Skull-Face," which not many care to spend $5.00 or close to it for. Enjoyed it a great deal.

Well, here it comes: I can't keep it down.

Calling All Fans and Readers! I *want* and *need* back issues of the weird-fantasy magazines at reasonable prices $1.00 for a 1931 WT, and prices running along that line, *(or less)* depending on the mag. This includes about 30 magazines. Well, readers, collectors, what have *you* to offer for sale?

Continued success to you, Mary Gnaedinger (and

(Continued on page 106)

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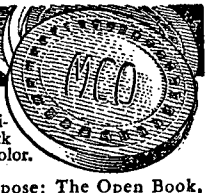

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 104)

I know you will have just that) and if you continue as you are now you will always have a loyal reader in

Burton S. Satz.
6404 Colgate Ave.,
Los Angeles 48, Calif.

P.S. I'd like to get as many listings as I can of vampire and werewolf short stories and novels. Can any readers or collectors help? Also factual and fictional novels and shorts concerning Jack the Ripper. Anyone help?

COMPLAINT

I happened to come across a copy of your magazine, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, a few days ago, containing a long story entitled "Skull-Face" by R. E. Howard. I read it because of the gruesome picture on the cover of the magazine.

I am prompted to write to you because it seems to me that this novelette is a rather feeble attempt to emulate two notable authors of mystery stories, namely Sax Rohmer and H. P. Lovecraft. The caves and passages under London filled with Chinamen and serpents, and the adventures of Gordon and Costigan, were part of the background and mechanics of Rohmer's Fu Manchu stories.

The monster Kathulos, buried for eons in the depths of the sea and eventually coming to the surface, was a somewhat anemic echo of Lovecraft's enormity, Cthulhu, who slept far down on the ocean bed in a stone sarcophagus until thrown up by an earthquake. The vapid little love interlude was so colourless that it seemed entirely unnecessary and out of place. No originality was displaced by adopting a name for the monster so similar to Lovecraft's "Cthulhu".

A Grumbler.
Toronto, Ont., Canada

BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE

For a number of years I have been a reader of your various fantasy magazines and have accummulated quite a large collection of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Fantastic Novels*, and *A. Merritts.* I am forced to dispose of these.

Howard E. Moore.
P. O. Box 904
Franklin, Penna.

BEST ISSUE OF '52

The Dec. F.F.M. was, in my humble opinion, the best F.F.M. of 1952.

I have a collection of over 100 zines (including a few F.F.M.) and will be glad to forward my price list to anyone who sends me a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Hillel Handloff.
37 So. Delancey Pl.
Atlantic City,
N. J.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

FOR TRADE

I would like to use this means to let fans know, who wish them, that I have some F.F.M. and F.N. How much are they? Well, just send me your want list and if I got 'em, I'll send them along for what postage costs. That's all, and no strings attached. Okay? I also see in letters in "Viewpoints" that some fans want Merritt. Well, I have most of his stories in pocket books that I'll send anyone who wants them, gratis.

Now to get to the meat of the matter. I have quite a few fantasies such as "Belshazzar" by Haggard, a fair first copy of "King in Yellow," "The Bat Flies Low" by Rohmer, some Wheatley, "Alas That Great City" by Ashton and "Sons of Solomon" by Read. The last two books closely resemble Haggard's writing. These books are for trade only for other books, pre-war F.F.M. or old *Weird Tales.*

Yours in fantasy,
James W. Moore.

Rt. 2, Box 110
Morganton, North Carolina

NEW READER

For the first time I have read an issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* (the October, '52 issue) and really enjoyed the stories. Particularly, "Skull-Face."

I think the magazine F.F.M. is well published and the stories well written and is a wonderful gift to fantasy lovers like myself. I wish I had known of it sooner.

Mrs. J. M. Schoonover.

1115 E. 13th Ave.,
Denver, Colorado

"SKULL-FACE" ISSUE GOOD

I'm glad to see you've finally printed something by Robert E. Howard. In my opinion he is tops in the realm of pure fantasy. You got off to a very good start here with the Howard yarn and Bradbury's "The Homecoming" from "Dark Carnival."

In regard to H.P.L.'s "Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath," it has seen print twice—first in the 1943 Arkham omnibus of Lovecraft's work "Beyond the Wall of Sleep;" now out of print and as far as price goes, out of reason. The second appearance was in 1948 when it ran serially in the "Arkham Sampler." These mags may still be available at $5.00 the set from the publishers. It is a Randolph Carter tale in a Dunsanian vein.

Keep up the good work. Will miss you mag. for a few months, as I'm due to go overseas the last of October.

Pvt. Glenn Lord U.S. 54067472
Repl. Gen.
Camp Stoneman, Calif.

NEEDS BACK ISSUE

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441 Langley Rd., Newton Center 59, Mass.

F.F.M. is. For my money, it's tops. I like your covers too.

A favorite F.F.M. of mine has been misplaced. It is the December, 1951 issue which contains "Valley of Eyes Unseen," one of the best stories I've read.

Would be very happy if any of the F.F.M. fans would be willing to sell me this issue.

Mrs. M. C. Wilson.
34 Avery St.,
Norwich, Conn.

VERY ENJOYABLE

I second the motion put forth by Robert E. Briney. Let's have more stories by Robert E. Howard, E. Hoffman Price, Clark Ashton Smith and H. P. Lovecraft. As to his suggestion that you use some material from *Astonishing*, I have an even better suggestion. Why not revive *Astonishing*? In this day of ever-increasing numbers of stf. and fantasy magazines, why can't *Astonishing*, which was a fine mag, be resurrected?

Paul Mittelbuscher.
Sweet Springs, Missouri.

THE "GEES" STORIES

I am not at all surprised that Jack Mann's "Her Ways Are Death" was very favorably received in its recent appearance in F.F.M. All of his "Gees" stories are fascinating. It might interest the readers to know something about the other tales in this series. Two others have been printed in your publications. "The Ninth Life" was a 4-part serial beginning in the August 5, 1939 *Argosy*. This was reprinted complete in the April 1950 number of *A. Merritt's Fantasy Magazine*. "Maker of Shadows" was a 5-part serial beginning in *Argosy* for Dec. 9, 1939. All of the "Gees" tales have been published in book form in England. The first of the series is "Gees' First Case." This is the only one of the set which is not fantasy. It's a straight detective. Another in the series, "The Kleinert Case", has only slight fantasy content and moves rather slowly. I doubt that this would be a possibility for F.F.M. However, the other Gees novels, "Nightmare Farm" and "Grey Shapes" are not only among the best of the series, but are definitely the most fantastic of the group. These two novels would undoubtedly be extremely popular with readers of F.F.M.

There is possibly one other "Gees" novel. Jack Mann's "The Glass Too Many" is the one Mann title that I have yet to add to my collection. I have been told this was the eighth and last "Gees" novel, but I cannot definitely confirm this.

It is generally known that Jack Mann is the pseudonym of Evelyn Charles Vivian. In addition to "The Valley of Silent Men" and "The City of Wonder", E. Charles Vivian wrote other excellent fantasy books which should see print in F.F.M. I refer to "A King There Was", "People of the Darkness", and "Woman Dominant".

Darrell C. Richardson.
6 Silver Ave., Covington, Ky.

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FIND THE HAPPY CHILDREN

(Continued from page 85)

"Please, Jeanne," Ed said, keeping his eyes on the child. "Susan, would you go down again and get one of those black boxes and bring it up to us?"

The girl looked at him, then gave a little shrug. Grown-ups were unpredictable, the gesture said. But if they wanted it, she was agreeable. She twinkled at them and skipped out and away to the steps that led down the bluff to the strand.

While they waited for her, not speaking, scarcely breathing, they felt the pull of the cube grow and grow. The shielded outer walls of the structure they were in seemed to be no deterrent at all to that pulsing promise of ecstasy. After a while it was a struggle, an agony to resist. By the time Susan had reached the sand and reappeared into their view threading her way through the motionless circle of people below them, Jeanne was trembling and whimpering.

THEY watched her approach closer and closer to that shimmering concentration of darkness. When she reached the clearing where it stood, she looked up at the bluff as if for approval. Then she reached down.

The pull snapped so suddenly that all three of her watchers staggered. The black object abruptly lost its shimmer, its indefinable glow of life. It looked like a plaything—odd but credible—in the girl's arms. Cradling it, she set out through the crowd for the stairway.

The people she passed were beginning to move, stretch, look dazedly around, as though they had awakened in strange surroundings from a prolonged drunk or narcosis.

"I don't know how it happened," Harbison muttered. "But that little kid is carrying the hope of our whole damned race up those steps."

"Don't you see it?" Ed cried. "That's the answer! That's the weapon we've been looking for!"

Harbison and Jeanne blinked at him.

"That child. Did you ever see a happier one? For her, the world is a wonderful place. It's sunny all the time. Everything that happens is a new and fascinating experience."

Harbison grunted, "I don't get it."

"She's in balance, man! She has no worries, no frustrations. She's perfectly happy. You've seen children like that. Maybe we all had a little of it, before growing up started to hem us in."

Breathlessly, Jeanne said, "You mean because they're so happy, there's nothing the cubes can offer that will attract them?"

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"Exactly. Children like Susan don't need reassurance and hope and help—at least not very often. And when they're like that, they somehow neutralize the cubes."

There was a shout from the laboratory. "We've got it open!" one of the technicians cried. They ran from the observation post to the portable laboratory, and the men stood aside silently to let them approach the viewing pane.

Using a saw like a scalpel, the mechanical hands had split the ebony cube in half. The sections lay like the open rind of a fruit. And they revealed . . .

"A brain," Ed Evans breathed. "Look—there are nerve ganglia, and that bulge looks like a lobe."

A faint cloudiness lay over the dissected cube. "A gas," one of the technicians said. "So far, it tests a little like sulphur dioxide. Funny, this one wasn't hard to cut at all. It's hard to believe after seeing a direct hit on that other."

"Alive," Ed said, "it's impregnable. Maybe it can shield itself with some force, just like it can reach out to people's minds."

"All these maybes," Harbison said, "I'll leave to the scientists. I'm going to the car to tell headquarters we have a sample for them."

"I'm going with you," Ed said. "Now that we have some hope, we'll get the weight of the Combine behind it."

Below on the beach, the murmur grew to a shouting, as a thousand people milled and wondered and picked up the threads of their lives again. Other groups, spaced down the beach, were still immobile, still transfixed. But now there was a way.

The word might not get to people everywhere in time. There wouldn't be many children who could qualify—for childhood is so often grey with restriction and disappointment. But here and there a sunny little soul like Susan's bloomed. Enough, perhaps, to stop the invasion in time.

Susan came marching up to Jeanne, with the lifeless cube in her arms. One of the technicians took it from her. "All the people woke up!" she cried delightedly.

Jeanne crushed the small body in her arms. "Yes, darling. And if you want to, you can help us wake up the others, too."

All over earth the word went out, pumping through the wave-lengths, from man to man:

Find the happy children. Find the ones to whom paradise can mean no more than what they have. Find them, and teach them the game of picking up black boxes.

Find the happy children, for they are the hope of the world.

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WORMS OF THE EARTH

(Continued from page 77)

He wheeled, his hand instinctively dropping to his sword. Outside the Ring the great stallion screamed savagely and reared against his tether. The night wind moaned through the waving grass and an abhorrent soft hissing mingled with it. Between the menhirs flowed a dark tide of shadows, unstable and chaotic. The Ring filled with glittering eyes which hovered beyond the dim illusive circle of illumination cast by the phosphorescent altar. Somewhere in the darkness a human voice tittered and gibbered idiotically. Bran stiffened, the shadows of a horror clawing at his soul.

HE STRAINED his eyes, trying to make out the shapes of those who ringed him. But he glimpsed only billowing masses of shadow which heaved and writhed and squirmed with almost fluid consistency.

"Let them make good their bargain!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Then see, oh king!" cried Atla in a voice of piercing mockery.

There was a stir, a seething in the writhing shadows, and from the darkness crept, like a four-legged animal, a human shape that fell down and groveled at Bran's feet and writhed and mowed, and lifting a death's-head, howled like a dying dog. In the ghastly light, Bran, soul-shaken, saw the blank glassy eyes, the bloodless features, the loose, writhing, froth-covered lips of sheer lunacy—gods, was this Titus Sulla, the proud lord of life and death in Ebbracum's proud city?

Bran bared his sword.

"I had thought to give this stroke in vengeance," he said somberly. "I give it in mercy—*vale Caesar!*"

The steel flashed in the eery light and Sulla's head rolled to the foot of the glowing altar, where it lay staring up at the shadowed sky.

"They harmed him not!" Atla's hateful laugh slashed the sick silence. "It was what he saw and came to know that broke his brain! Like all his heavy-footed race, he knew nothing of the secrets of this ancient land. This night he has been dragged through the deepest pits of Hell!"

"Well for the Romans that they know not the secrets of this accursed land," Bran roared, maddened, "with its monster-haunted meres, its foul witch-women, and its lost caverns and subterranean realms where spawn in the darkness shapes of Hell!"

"Are they more foul than a mortal who seeks their aid?" cried Atla with a shriek of fearful mirth. "Give them their Black Stone!"

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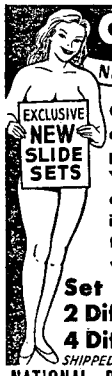

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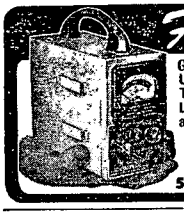

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A cataclysmic loathing shook Bran's soul with red fury.

"Aye, take your cursed Stone!" he roared, snatching it from the altar and dashing it among the shadows with such savagery that bones snapped under its impact. A hurried babel of grisly tongues rose and the shadows heaved in turmoil. One segment of the mass detached itself for an instant and Bran cried out in fierce revulsion, though he caught only a fleeting glimpse of the thing, had only a brief impression of a broad strangely flattened head, pendulous writhing lips that bared curved pointed fangs, and a hideously misshapen, dwarfish body that seemed *mottled*—all set off by those unwinking reptilian eyes. Gods!—the myths had prepared him for horror in human aspect, horror induced by bestial visage and stunted deformity—but this was the horror of nightmare and the night.

"Go back to Hell and take your idol with you!" he yelled, brandishing his clenched fists to the skies, as the thick shadows receded, flowing back and away from him like the foul waters of some black flood. "Your ancestors were men, though strange and monstrous—but gods, ye have become in ghastly fact what my people called ye in scorn! Worms of the earth, back into your holes and burrows! Ye foul the air and leave on the clean earth the slime of the serpents ye have become! 'Gonar was right—there are shapes too foul to use even against Rome!"

He sprang from the Ring as a man flees the touch of a coiling snake, and tore the stallion free. At his elbow Atla was shrieking with fearful laughter, all human attributes dropped from her like a cloak in the night.

"King of Pictland!" she cried, "King of fools! Do you blench at so small a thing? Stay and let me show you real fruits of the pits! Ha! ha! ha! Run, fool, run! But you are stained with the taint—you have called them forth and they will remember! And in their own time they will come to you again!"

He yelled a wordless curse and struck her savagely in the mouth with his open hand. She staggered, blood starting from her lips, but her fiendish laughter only rose higher.

Bran leaped into the saddle, wild for the clean heather and the cold blue hills of the north where he could plunge his sword into the clean slaughter and his sickened soul into the red maelstrom of battle, and forget the horror which lurked below the fens of the west. He gave the frantic stallion the rein, and rode through the night like a hunted ghost, till the hellish laughter of the were-woman died out in the darkness behind. ■■■

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(Continued from page 33)

its own sake. Those men who survived—those eager to obey, eager to live for one another, since they had nothing else to vindicate them—those men could neither carry on, nor preserve what they had received. Thus did all thought, all science, all wisdom, perish on earth. Thus did men—men with nothing to offer save their great number—lose the steel towers, the flying ships, the power wires, all the things they had not created and could never keep. Perhaps, later, some men had been born with the mind and the courage to recover these things which were lost; perhaps these men came before the Councils of Scholars. They were answered as I have been—and for the same reasons.

But I still wonder how it was possible, in those graceless years of transition, long ago, that men did not see whither they were going, and went on, in blindness and cowardice, to their fate. I wonder, for it is hard for me to conceive how men who knew the word "I," could give it up and not know what they lost. But such has been the story, for I have lived in the City of the damned, and I know what horror men permittted to be brought upon them.

Perhaps, in those days, there were a few among men, a few of clear sight and clean soul, who refused to surrender that word. What agony must have been theirs before that which they saw coming and could not stop! Perhaps they cried out in protest and in warning. But men paid no heed to their warning. And they, these few, fought a hopeless battle, and they perished with their banners smeared by their own blood. And they chose to perish, for they knew. To them, I send my salute across the centuries, and my pity.

Theirs is the banner in my hand. And I

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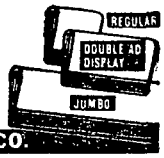

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wish I had the power to tell them that the despair of their hearts was not to be final, and their night was not without hope. For the battle they lost can never be lost. For that which they died to save can never perish. Through all the darkness, through all the shame of which men are capable, the spirit of man will remain alive on this earth. It may sleep, but it will awaken. It may wear chains, but it will break through. And man will go on. Man, not men.

Here, on this mountain, I and my sons and my chosen friends shall build our new land and our fort. And it will become as the heart of the earth, lost and hidden at first, but beating, beating louder each day. And word of it will reach every corner of the earth. And the roads of the world will become as veins which will carry the best of the world's blood to my threshold. And all my brothers, and the Councils of my brothers, will hear of it, but they will be impotent against me. And the day will come when I shall break all the chains of the earth, and raze the cities of the enslaved, and my home will become the capital of a world where each man will be free to exist for his own sake.

For the coming of that day shall I fight, I and my sons and my chosen friends. For the freedom of Man. For his rights. For his life. For his honor.

And here, over the portals of my fort, I shall cut in the stone the word which is to be my beacon and my banner. The word which will not die, should we all perish in battle. The word which can never die on this earth, for it is the heart of it and the meaning and the glory. The sacred word: E G O ■ ■ ■

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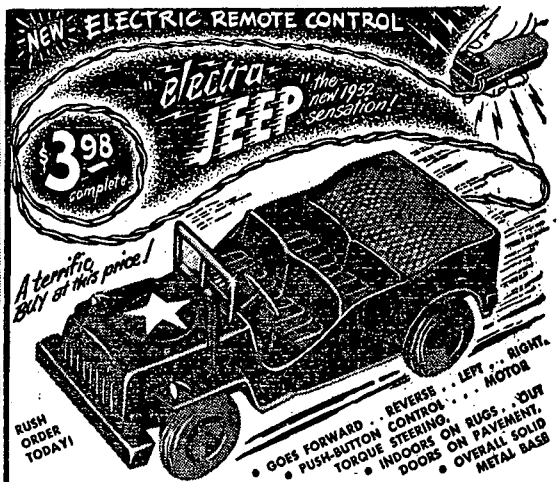
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Fascinate the youngsters with hours of fun and action. Imagine—every car WORKS in the line of duty! 1 car with working windshield wiper, 2 cars with windows that open and close, 1 police car with gun that bangs and recoils, 1 ambulance with ringing and swaying bell, 2 taxis with meters that register fare, 1 fire chief car with bell that rings and sways. All 8 cars made of durable steel . . . rubber wheels cannot come out . . . bottoms completely enclosed . . . all new Two-tone and metallic finish . . . all differently colored. SEND NO MONEY. (C.O.D., you pay postage. Remit with order, we pay postage.)

NOVELTY MART Dept. 103
59 East 8th Street, New York 3, N. Y.

Please rush the items checked below:

- ☐ ELECTRA-JEEP 3.98
- ☐ HAPPY the COWBOY 2.98
- ☐ ACTION FLEET 2.98
- ☐ Send C.O.D. I'll pay postage.
- ☐ I enclose $....., you pay postage.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZONE ____ STATE _____

RUSH YOUR ORDER TODAY! SATISFACTION GUARANTEED on all of the above items.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'LL GIVE YOU... THESE AUTO SEAT COVERS AS A BONUS!

And pay you well besides if you will show them and take orders from car owners in spare time only!

Just 1 sale a day can pay you up to $16.50 daily in profits!

It's no trick at all to make extra money day after day when you can offer car owners America's greatest seat cover values . . . and a choice of patterns, styles and materials that will fit their car such as no one else in your territory could possibly offer! Free Sample Outfit that fits into your pocket . . . complete with swatches of the gorgeous new materials . . will start you taking orders at once. No one can compete with you in wide choice, in quality —and in expert tailoring that makes covers fit like a pair of gloves. And when you quote the low direct prices that are only a fraction of what the customer expects to pay you'll find you can make money hand over fist writing up the fast orders! Line includes nationally advertised sensations like BLACK EBONY Saran, in the new Black and Silver Watermelon Stripe, beautiful beyond description BAMBOO, luxurious, brilliant FIESTA, colorful BULLFIGHTER PLAIDS, plus many other exclusive patterns to choose from, all at unbelievably low prices. It's no trick at all to make big money, whether you sell full time or just in spare time. OPPORTUNITY TO SELL AT WHOLESALE TO GARAGES, SERVICE STATIONS, ETC.

$45.00 SET OF COVERS
For Own Use
GIVEN AS BONUS

GIVE MAKE, YEAR AND MODEL OF YOUR CAR. No experience needed.

Make all the extra money you need easily just by showing! Every car owner a "hot" prospect. YEAR AROUND STEADY PROFITS. No investment to make. Actual seat covers given to producers for OWN use! Write for Free Selling Kit and actual samples TODAY!

KEY PRODUCTS CORP., 800 N. Clark St., Dept. 46-E, Chicago 10, Ill.

RUSH NAME FOR FREE OUTFIT!

KEY PRODUCTS CORP., Dept. 46-E
800 N. Clark St., Chicago 10, Ill.

Rush Free Sample Outfit at once. (If you own a car include the following information):

Make.... Year.... Model.....

Name .....

Address .....

City..... Zone... State.....

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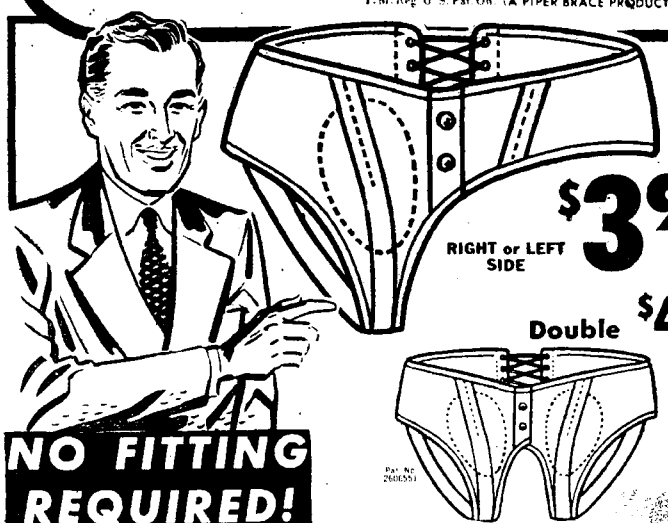
NOW! GET AMAZING NEW COMFORT and RELIEF with

Patented

RUPTURE-EASER

T.M. Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. (A PIPER BRACE PRODUCT)



NO FITTING REQUIRED!

- for MEN
- for WOMEN
- for CHILDREN
- Over 500,000 Grateful Users!

RIGHT or LEFT SIDE **$3.95**

Double **$4.95**

A strong form-fitting washable support designed to give you relief and comfort. Snaps up in front. Adjustable back lacing and adjustable leg straps. Soft flat groin pad—**no steel or leather bands.** Unexcelled for comfort, **invisible under light clothing.** Also used as after-operation support. **Just measure around the lower part of your abdomen and specify right side, left side or double.** Your RUPTURE-EASER is ready to wear—just adjust back lacing and leg straps—and you face the world again with confidence and comfort. The immediate relief is almost unbelievable.

MOST EFFECTIVE HERNIA SUPPORT DEVISED

Soft gentle support aids Nature relieve this serious affliction in the most effective way. Brings wonderful new freedom from fear and worry. No binding, torturing steel or leather bands. RUPTURE-EASER has helped thousands of users—restored them to useful comfortable living—the same is YOURS FOR THE ORDERING!

INVISIBLE UNDER CLOTHING—Washable. Sanitary
Wear RUPTURE-EASER with new confidence under your lightest clothing. No more visible than any usual undergarment—no revealing bulk to hide. **Fits under girdles and corsets.** Washable—easy to keep fresh and sanitary.

BLESSED RELIEF DAY AND NIGHT
you can sleep in it—work in it—bathe in it!

10 DAY TRIAL OFFER
Money-back guarantee if you don't get relief

Piper Brace Co., Dept. PFG-53
811 Wyandotte, Kansas City 5, Mo.

DELAY MAY BE SERIOUS ORDER TODAY

Note: Be sure to give size and side.

What Folks Just Like You Write About RUPTURE-EASER

Mr. O.B.R. of Boston ... "Send me another as I did. Oh what relief I have found from its help!"

M.D.S. of Greenwich, N.Y. ... "I find my Rupture-Easer the most comfortable and satisfactory of any truss I have ever worn. Send me another."

M.S. of Anderson, Ind. says "It is one of the finest things I have ever worn and has **made my life worth living.** It has given me untold ease and comfort."

A.G.W. of Oakville, Ia. ... "I wish you had made the Rupture-Easer 50 years ago."

PIPER BRACE COMPANY
811 Wyandotte, Dept. PFG-53 Kansas City 5, Mo.

Please send my RUPTURE-EASER by return mail.

Right Side.... ☐ $3.95
Left Side..... ☐ $3.95
Double ..... ☐ $4.95

Measure around lowest part of my abdomen is ..... INCHES.

We Prepay Postage Except on C.O.D.'s
(Note: Be sure to give Size and Side when ordering.)

Enclosed is: ☐ Money Order. ☐ Check for $.....
☐ Send C. O. D.

Name .....

Address .....

City and State .....

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